

CONNECTING TO THE CLOUD:  
ISAAC BACKUS' MODEL FOR RENEWAL IN TODAY'S CHURCH

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To my amazing wife Holly and two lovely children Mackenzie and Ethan. Thank  
you for willingly sacrificing so much to make this dream a reality.

## EPIGRAPH

The rich world of his ancestors set the standards for Dietrich Bonhoeffer's own life. It gave him a certainty of judgment and manner that cannot be acquired in a single generation. He grew up in a family that believed the essence of learning lay not in a formal education but in the deeply rooted obligation to be guardians of a great historical heritage and intellectual tradition.

-Eberhard Bethge, *Bonhoeffer: Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy: A righteous Gentile vs. the Third Reich*

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the usefulness of intentional connections with our ecclesial history for the purpose of sparking revival and renewal in Baptist congregations. The project initially presents the growing identity crisis facing Baptists and the causes behind the crisis. The convictions that distinguish Baptists from other congregations, if not appropriately practiced and passed on, threaten to continue eroding Baptist foundations indefinitely. By looking at the ministry of Isaac Backus, this project will propose that pursuing historical connections is both consistent with Baptist distinctives and thoroughly biblical. When these connections are promoted appropriately they offer the possibility of sustained ministry from generation to generation that is solidly orthodox in theology and increasingly zealous in practice.

## INTRODUCTION

Jesus' commission to His disciples before He ascended into heaven has propelled the church from generation to generation to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations."<sup>1</sup> Jesus made His desire clear our faith - content and passion - is to be passed on to others geographically and generationally. Jesus' commission clearly delineates what is of primary importance for His church - the ministry of grounding believers in the "faith that was once for all delivered to the saints."<sup>2</sup>

With each passing generation the methodology of carrying out this commission has retained some semblance of past generation's efforts, while at the same time taking on the indelible mark of uniqueness and creativity of the current generation. Though methods have changed, one thing is sure - those of us who claim the title "follower of Jesus Christ" in the twenty-first century do so as a result of the faithful labors of many generations of Christ followers who comprise our "great cloud of witnesses."<sup>3</sup>

One day the current generation will join this great cloud of witnesses for ensuing generations. They will provide the foundation upon which these subsequent generations will work to develop one another into firmly rooted, spiritually maturing followers of Jesus Christ. If done well, succeeding generations will then have the passion and capacity to carry on and pass along Jesus' Great Commission in an unending succession of faith.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:19, The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001). All Scripture references will be from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Jude 3.

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 12:1.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 28:18-20.

For nearly four hundred years Baptist churches in America have sought to faithfully carry out this commission alongside the rest of the body of Christ. Yet, since their beginnings, Baptist churches have faced the challenge of fragmentation.<sup>5</sup> The nature of Baptist life feeds our fragmentation because even though our theology is thoroughly Protestant, our interpretations and implementations of that theology are vastly diverse. This diversity has created over fifty sub-groups of Baptists in America today.<sup>6</sup> Baptists started out highly valuing the importance of freedom of private interpretation of Scripture, congregational autonomy, and freedom of conscience - all of which have fueled nonconformity and dissent.<sup>7</sup> Baptists continue to highly value these today. The fact that there is no authority, other than the Scriptures, that exists to control what Baptists believe or practice<sup>8</sup> when it comes to their faith allows for a great measure of diversity and freedom.<sup>9</sup>

This diversity and freedom serves as a double-edged sword that not only fuels our uniqueness but also threatens to destroy our historic identity. These values that have for centuries been the fabric of Baptist life may actually be the very things that threaten the future of Baptists. The dissent and nonconformity that fueled the Radical Reformers' stand against the unholy fusion of church and state during the sixteenth- and

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<sup>5</sup> The challenge of fragmentation is becoming an increasingly troubling issue throughout the Church, not just for Baptists. See Jim Belcher, *Deep Church* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> A complete list can be found at <http://www.allaboutbaptists.com/groups.html> (accessed, December 1, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> According to Nathan Hatch these categories classify Baptists as Restorationists. See, Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 167-179.

<sup>8</sup> For some Baptists this may no longer be true.

<sup>9</sup> Charles W. Deweese, "Big Issues Facing Baptists Today," Baptist Heritage and the Twenty-First Century pamphlet series, <http://www.baptisthistory.org/bhhs/21stcentury/bigissues.html> (accessed November 29, 2010). Bill Leonard, *Baptists in America*, Columbia Contemporary American Religion Series (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005).



seventeenth-centuries may actually be pulling current Baptists away from their very own heritage.

Baptist pastors and denominational leaders always seem to be looking for the way forward. In our church culture there is an endless supply of books, conferences, and resources providing “fresh” and “new” insights telling us how we can grow our churches, win new converts, and disciple our congregations into mature, reproducing believers. In the process we find ourselves actually losing sight of our commission and losing ground to the enemy.<sup>10</sup> There is a danger that the vision of religious freedom that has shaped Baptist life since its inception may now actually detach us from all connections with our “great cloud of witnesses,” the faithful heritage that has made us who we are.

Some firmly rooted anchors need to be introduced into Baptist life. Without intentionally introducing anchors that balance the influence of these unique Baptist convictions, we run the risk of continuing to drift further and further from any connection to the historical components that establish Baptists as who we are.

Perhaps it is time to look back to find our way forward. For all the new and insightful suggestions for leading our churches into future revival, the way forward may actually be found in the past. Church history has the potential of serving as an anchor for Baptist pastors and congregations who seek to faithfully practice and pass on their faith. By using our ecclesial history intentionally and appropriately, we can anchor our faith to the great cloud of witnesses that has gone before us. We thereby stand on their shoulders, building upon their foundation for generations yet to come. This further provides a model for these generations of how to do the same when the baton of faith is passed to them. Each generation can make the faith their own in the unique context in which they live while remaining solidly connected to those who have gone before.

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<sup>10</sup> Tom Clegg and Warren Bird, *Lost in America: How You and Your Church Can Impact the World Next Door* (Loveland, CO: Group, 2001).

In his preface to *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists*, Isaac Backus insightfully writes the following regarding humanity's often arrogant approach to historical dependence and study, "History has been so written and improved, either for party purposes, or mere amusement, that some serious persons have been ready to treat it as a thing foreign to religion, and of little service to mankind." Though this is the initial response, Backus observes a different response when pressing the issue, "Yet the same persons will readily own, that nothing teaches like experience; and what is true history but the experiences of those who have gone before us?"<sup>11</sup>

Backus' words are as relevant today as they were three centuries ago. The implications of these words continue to challenge our Baptist moorings when it comes to the use of history. We stand on the shoulders of our brothers and sisters who have faithfully contended for the faith that was handed down to the saints. We accomplish this through the study of their experiences and then by evaluating their victories and failures and learning from them.<sup>12</sup> By utilizing the extra-biblical resources they have developed and passed along, we honor the foundation of past generations. Moreover, we continue the building of God's spiritual house.

The way forward through the past will require Baptists to re-examine some long held prejudices that have been deeply ingrained in our Baptist blood. It will also require a re-examination of some long held denominational distinctives. In both cases the purpose is to determine whether our current understanding and adherence to these

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<sup>11</sup> Isaac Backus, *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists, Volume I*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (repr. Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Newton, MA: Backus Historical Society, 1871), vii.

<sup>12</sup> Jude 1:3. See also 2 Peter 2:21.

prejudices and distinctives is biblically and historically rooted. Where it is not, adjustment is needed.

One of the primary prejudices that must be considered is our understanding of the place and value of tradition. For many Baptists, tradition has been seen as a plague. However, by humbly re-evaluating tradition in its historical context and looking at the example of one of history's most prominent Baptists and his use of the past, perhaps we can find our way forward to renewal in our congregations.

If the connection with our faith heritage continues to disintegrate, we stand accountable for robbing our posterity of an invaluable tool in developing rich and vibrant faith. Consequently, this threatens to impede their effectiveness in passing the faith along to their descendants. The great cloud of witnesses must not drift out of our sight or that of our children, as it seems to be slowly doing for many. If we are to stay connected, we must be more intentional about acquainting ourselves with some of the great tools at our disposal that have been left by the Church throughout its history in the form of creeds, confessions, and catechisms.<sup>13</sup> These resources when seen within their proper relationship to Scripture can provide us with a well-spring of material in aiding our efforts to faithfully live out and pass along the commission that Jesus Christ has passed on to us. They can serve to ground believers in their faith and bring about a renewed vitality and passion for spiritual growth.

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<sup>13</sup> **Creed**, "refers to statements from the early church that Christians in all times and places have recognized – the *Apostles' Creed*, the *Nicene Creed*, the *Definition of Chalcedon*, and (less frequently) the *Athanasian Creed*." Creeds have tended to exclude and prescribe what members must believe in order to be included. **Confession of Faith**, "designates the formal statements of Christian faith written by Protestants since the earliest days of the Reformation." Confessions are brief summations of faith that affirm what a group believes at a given time and place for the purpose of describing beliefs and making inclusion possible. **Catechism**, "[is] the structured statements of faith written in the form of questions and answers which often fulfill the same functions as confessions." *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. s. v. "Confessions of Faith" ed. Walter E. Elwell, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001). Catechisms are used by the church and believers as a tool in the "ministry of grounding and growing God's people in the Gospel and its implications for doctrine, devotion, duty, and delight." J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 29.

There is biblical and historical justification for pursuing this renewed path forward as Baptists. Looking at examples from the Old and New Testament as well as general examples from the confessional testimony of Baptists reveals that pursuing a historical connection is not only built into the fabric of Baptist tradition, it is also thoroughly biblical. There are a host of general examples that will be examined in this paper. Primary influence will be placed upon the specific witness of Baptist pastor and historian Isaac Backus. His example as a pastor who modeled longevity in his church and distinction as a Baptist historian in colonial New England provides a model for us to build upon as pastors seeking to lead faithfully in the twenty-first century.

The thesis will progress as follows. Chapter one will develop the problem being faced by Baptists. This chapter will show our historical crisis and how it is stripping us of our identity. Chapter two will present the biblical and historical foundation for pursuing an appropriate and intentional connection to our ecclesial history. Chapter three will address the issue of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition throughout the history of the Church, as well as the tools the Church has used to transmit its history from generation to generation through creeds, confessions, and catechisms. Chapter four develops the model Baptists find in Isaac Backus' life and ministry. Chapter five is an examination of how Isaac Backus' legacy has continued unbroken in the two centuries following his death. His lasting legacy highlights how our orthodox faith can be passed on vibrantly rather than as lifeless symbol and tradition. Chapter six presents a suggested model for developing and handing over a contextualized heritage that can accommodate the new wineskins of each generation. The model consists of three convictions that drive

our ministry as we seek to make use of historic faith connections in ways that translate to each generation.

This thesis is not meant to serve as *the* answer to all the challenges we face as Baptists. This is not the “magic bullet” guaranteed to bring revival to every congregation that puts these principles into practice. Rather, it is the result of the recognition in the author’s life of the deeply significant impact my faith heritage has had on my spiritual journey. The deeper I dig into the history of my brothers and sisters in the faith the deeper my love for them grows and the richer my understanding of the character and work of God becomes. Consequently, I am driven to treasure the orthodox theology they have preserved and passed on and zealously do the same for those who come after me. The hope is that this thesis will shine a light in the Baptist world on a concept that is old and used by many, but sorely neglected by others. Only God holds the key that unlocks the door to revival and renewal; however, the biblical and historical witness attest to the importance God places on intentionally remembering His mighty works in and through his people in every generation. May we recapture the immense value of our faith heritage.

## CHAPTER 1

### IDENTITY CRISIS

Thus says the Lord: “Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.

-Jeremiah 6:16a ESV

I grew up with a strong foundation upon which to understand the framework of who I was. We were a middle class family living in small town America. We had a stable home. My parents nurtured this stability through a combination of boundaries and love. The boundaries were repeatedly explained, and the love was always unconditional but tough when the boundaries were challenged. Most of my formative years were spent in close proximity to relatives. Yet, I distinctly remember a few occasions in my childhood when I was overcome with a paralyzing sense of disorientation that upset my stable foundation. The conditions were the same every time it occurred. In the midst of a deep and satisfying sleep something would interrupt my solace like a runaway train, thrusting me back into a conscious world that I neither recognized nor was ready to face. In those first few moments of consciousness while my brain was still reeling to catch up with my body, I was filled with panic as I groped for some frame of reference that would make sense of my surroundings. I could not piece together where I was or how I got there. Though all the puzzle pieces of stability were where they had always been, my access to them was severed, and the sinking feeling, though ephemeral, was incredibly powerful.

Those short bouts of memory loss generate sympathy for those who experience legitimate cases of amnesia. A few fleeting moments of disorientation over where one is

and how one ended up there is haunting enough. Surely struggling to locate who you are must be exponentially more unnerving. I recently witnessed this reality while channel surfing. I came across a show in which a mentalist<sup>1</sup> approached individuals on the street and within seconds hypnotized them without their consent or knowledge. Each subject was directed to do an unusual task while under hypnosis. When the person came out of the hypnotic state, they could not remember anything about their experience while hypnotized, leaving them visibly disturbed and disoriented. Without a frame of reference each person was unable to orient themselves to their surroundings or the new information they were receiving. Some were uncooperative and irate, refusing to believe the allegations of the mentalist even when he offered tangible proof. Each was unsettled by the assertion that their experience and their familiar framework had been momentarily disconnected thereby briefly sabotaging their sense of identity.<sup>2</sup>

Our sense of identity needs definition, a frame of reference. An identity crisis results when our sense of identity loses touch with its orienting framework. In both examples above there was a detachment of the real experience and the familiar framework that grounded each individual's identity in that reality. My detachment lasted only as long as it took for my brain to wake up and put all the puzzle pieces together again. But for the targets of the mentalist it was as if the chain connecting them to their anchor had been severed, leaving them adrift in uncertainty and anxiety. They were at the mercy of the mentalist without their point of reference. Even tangible proof, that

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<sup>1</sup> mentalist—**noun** 1. a person who believes in or advocates mentalism. 2. a person who believes that the mind and its functions are a legitimate area of psychological research. 3. a mind reader, psychic, or fortuneteller. mentalist. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/mentalist> (accessed June 21, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> *Deception with Keith Barry*, "Black Ops," Season 1, Episode 1 originally aired, May 31, 2011.

would typically bring security, induced more uncertainty. It was not until a reconnection was made with the individual's supporting definition that the disorientation surrounding the individual's sense of identity subsided.

This same type of lost connection can be seen among Baptists today, and the gap is growing ever larger. As the disconnect grows, it is producing a mounting identity crisis for current and future generations of Baptists. We have a rich and stable heritage from both Baptist legacy and our larger ecclesial traditions. Though our spiritual ancestors were not perfect, they have left us with a strong foundation upon which to understand and form our sense of identity as Baptists. Unfortunately, current trends among Baptist churches appear to not only reveal a slipping connection with our Baptist framework, but also, tragically, there seems to be no significant connection ever established in many cases. With each passing generation our grip on what a Baptist identity really is fades ever further into obscurity, and our identity crisis deepens. Without an urgent, intentional, and concerted effort on the part of individuals and churches, our Baptist identity will be lost, and the stability it once brought will no longer be available to future generations of Baptist Christians.

### **A Historical Crisis: Reconnecting with Our Heritage**

Baptist churches and leaders must maintain some sort of connection with their denominational heritage and the larger heritage of the Church. For many, perhaps most, this will require a reconnection with a lost heritage. This heritage is a critical element of the framework that roots our sense of identity as Christians and as Baptists. Much of the identity of the Church is found in the groundwork that has been laid by our forefathers as



they toiled through persecution and martyrdom, false teaching, and compromise, as well as disagreements and divisions. Their tireless efforts to preserve and advance the purity of the church and the purpose of God provide us with an invaluable foundation upon which to build. Unless we intentionally stay connected with this heritage, we miss the blessing and benefit of the labors of those who have gone before us.

At times Baptists have expressed aversion to acknowledging and studying the Early Church Fathers and Tradition for fear of exalting these resources to equal status with or greater status than the Scriptures. Though this is a valid concern, as witnessed through the abuses observed in the history of the Church, it has often resulted in a disregard that goes beyond a healthy caution to the point of preventing any kind of connection to history and its resources, including our own Baptist history. For example, few people under the age of 50 today who occupy the pews of Southern Baptist Churches seem to be familiar with the history of Lottie Moon, even though a yearly Christmas missions offering honoring her sacrifice in spreading the gospel to China through her mission efforts is observed by most Southern Baptist congregations. Though many over the age of 50 may be able to recount a general history of Lottie Moon and, perhaps, Annie Armstrong,<sup>3</sup> one would be hard pressed to find a person who could explain the life

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<sup>3</sup> Lottie Moon served as an early missionary to China (1873-1912). Her commitment to international missions was so resolute that she ultimately sacrificed everything she had including her own life for the advance of the gospel in China. Her example has been memorialized in the yearly Christmas offering that takes place among Southern Baptist churches to support ongoing missionary efforts by Southern Baptists across the globe. Additional information about the life and significance of Lottie Moon can be found at <http://www.imb.org/main/give/page.asp?StoryID=5524&LanguageID=1709> (accessed November 14, 2010), or Cathy Butler, *The Story of Lottie Moon* (Birmingham, AL: Women's Missionary Union, SBC, 2004). Annie Armstrong was founder of the Women's Missionary Union of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1888. Today Southern Baptists continue to honor her commitment to missions and supporting missions by naming the yearly Easter offering for North American missionaries after her. Additional information about the life and significance of Annie Armstrong can be found at <http://www.anniearmstrong.com/site/pp.asp?c=8oILLTOqGnF&b=310528> (accessed November 14, 2010), or Cathy Butler, *The Story of Annie Armstrong* (Birmingham, AL: Women's Missionary Union, SBC, 2004).

and legacy of William Bullein Johnson<sup>4</sup> or James Petigru Boyce,<sup>5</sup> let alone Athanasius, Irenaeus, and Augustine.<sup>6</sup>

Baptists align with the Free Church movement, and yet the question must be asked and answered: “Are we free when we are not remotely or barely conscious of what traditions have molded our understanding of Scripture?”<sup>7</sup> Ergun Caner has stated, “We stand at a period of time when heritage means nothing.”<sup>8</sup> Oftentimes we as the evangelical church are not only concerned about but consumed by the here and now. We measure our success in the proverbial areas of “bodies, budgets, and buildings.” We laud expository preaching and the practical application of Scripture to life. We talk about visions for the future and where we are going but seldom do we speak of where we have been. We ignore the past rather than celebrate and learn from the heritage of the Church.

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<sup>4</sup> Emir Caner and Ergun Caner, *The Sacred Trust: Sketches of the Southern Baptist Convention Presidents* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 1-5. Johnson was the 1<sup>st</sup> president of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1845-51. For a more thorough biographical sketch see, Hortense Woodson, *Giant in the Land: The Life of William B. Johnson: First President of the Southern Baptist Convention* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Caner, *The Sacred Trust*, 18-21, Boyce was the founder and 1<sup>st</sup> president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. For a more thorough biographical sketch see, Tom J. Nettles, *James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesman* (Phillipsburg, N.J: P & R Publishers, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Athanasius was the 4<sup>th</sup> century Father who led the battle against Arius and his theology claiming that Jesus Christ was not fully God. Irenaeus was a 2<sup>nd</sup> century Father of the church who wrote against the heresy Gnosticism. He was a student of Polycarp who claimed to be a disciple of the Apostle John. Augustine is considered by most scholars as the most important figure in the ancient Western church. His writings have been used by theologians for centuries as a framework of orthodoxy from Aquinas to the Reformers and beyond.

<sup>7</sup> John Van Engen, “Tradition” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Ergun Mehmet Caner, class notes, CHHI 694 “History of Baptists” taught at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, May 2005.

As an example, homecomings, that seek to celebrate and remember the legacy of the local church are becoming a thing of the past. They are seen as too old fashioned and out of date. We justify this move with statements hinting at the fact that people are not interested in looking at the past, hearing the music of the past, listening to the preaching of the past, and hearing testimony of the sacrifices made by those who have gone before. We rationalize that in order to grow a church we must be forward thinking and, with Paul, forget what is behind and strain toward what is ahead.<sup>9</sup> As these local celebrations become a thing of the past, it is a symptom of a larger epidemic within the Baptist Church. This epidemic disregards and, at times, even blatantly ignores the heritage that has made the Church what it is today, overlooking the fact that it also lays the foundation for what it will be tomorrow.

There are glimpses of hope on the horizon. In recent years there has been a growing consensus among Baptists for a return to an attitude of appreciation and respect for the tradition of the Church as understood during the patristic period. This call has developed out of an understanding of the value of the tradition of the Church even for those who come from the Free Church movement. Baptist theologian Millard J. Erickson has written, “There is a positive value to tradition; it can assist us to understand Scripture and its application.”<sup>10</sup> Recognition of this reality is growing among Baptist scholars and leaders and resulting in a cry for a return to a healthy respect of these resources. However, most of what is being written and presented is academic and professional rather

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<sup>9</sup> Philippians 3:12.

<sup>10</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 284.

than reaching the grass roots level. Until it reaches the congregation it will be difficult for any change to reach and penetrate the hearts and lives of those sitting in the pews.

An example of spiritual nearsightedness at the grass roots is the belief that Baptists have always been identified by the motto, “No creed but the Bible,” when in reality “prior to the twentieth century, most Baptist theologians,” writes Timothy George, “spoke very affirmingly of ‘the Baptist creed.’ They strongly rejected the idea that voluntary, conscientious adherence to an explicit doctrinal standard was somehow foreign to the Baptist tradition.”<sup>11</sup> There is considerable evidence throughout the sixteenth and, especially, the seventeenth century of Baptist confessions, creeds, and catechisms.<sup>12</sup>

The presence of these creeds reveals the respect and connection that early Baptists had with what would be identified as the Tradition of the Church. In transcribing one of these creeds, the British Baptist’s *Orthodox Creed of 1679*, William Grace of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary writes in his preface of the fact that the Creed was modeled after the *Westminster Confession*, as was *the Second London Confession* of two years earlier.<sup>13</sup> The *Orthodox Creed* also includes the full texts of the

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<sup>11</sup> Timothy George, “Is Jesus a Baptist?” in, *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future*, ed. David S. Dockery (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Henry C. Vedder, *A Short History of the Baptists* (Philadelphia, PA: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907). In the introduction to this book Vedder gives a brief overview of these confessions and catechisms in seeking to reveal the origin of the Baptist name according to the scientific method. It is through Baptist literature we possess, namely the confessions and catechisms of the early Baptists that he traces this.

<sup>13</sup> W. Madison Grace II, “Transcriber’s Preface to An Orthodox Creed: An Unabridged Seventeenth Century General Baptist Confession.” In *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, Volume 48, no.2, spring 2006, 125, <http://www.baptisttheology.org/documents/PrefaceOrthodoxCreed.pdf> (accessed October 30, 2009).

*Apostle's Creed*, the *Nicene Creed*, and the *Athanasian Creed*,<sup>14</sup> because the drafters believed that,

The Three Creeds, (*viz.*) *Nicene Creed*, *Athanasius his Creed*, and the *Apostles Creed*, (as they are commonly called) ought thoroughly to be received, and believed. For we believe they may be proved by most undoubted Authority of holy Scripture, and are necessary to be understood of all Christians; and to be instructed in the knowledge of them, by the Ministers of Christ, according to the Analogie of Faith, recorded in sacred Scriptures (upon which these Creeds are grounded), and Catechistically opened, and expounded in all Christian Families, for the edification of Young and Old; which might be a means to prevent Heresie in Doctrine, and Practice, these Creeds containing all things in a brief manner, that are necessary to be known, fundamentally, in order to our Salvation.<sup>15</sup>

We must be careful not to confuse this respect for creeds in Baptist history with an assertion that Baptists are a creedal people. Baptists have never advocated creedalism. Dr. Timothy George clarifies two reasons why Baptists are and must remain distinctive in this regard. The Baptist relationship with religious liberty, supported by the full spectrum of Baptists, supporting their belief that God alone is Lord of the conscience. Additionally, the Baptists' respect for the authority of Scripture which has prevented them from ever accepting or espousing any humanly constructed doctrinal statements elevated on the same level or elevated above that of the Bible.<sup>16</sup> Our history therefore reveals that it is possible to maintain our respect for ecclesiastical heritage without compromising our stand for religious liberty and Scripture as the supreme standard for life and doctrine.

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<sup>14</sup> A full text of each of these creeds is found in the Appendix One.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Monck, et.al, "An Orthodox Creed, or a Protestant Confession of Faith," In *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, volume 48, number 2, spring 2006. p. 168 <http://www.baptisttheology.org/documents/OrthodoxCreed.pdf> (accessed October 30, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> George, "Is Jesus a Baptist?" 94.

Tom J. Nettles has written, “Any use of confessions that does indeed usurp the place of Scripture should be rejected, or at least corrected, immediately.”<sup>17</sup> This is true, but we must be wary of carrying this conviction too far. George offers a balanced perspective through his overview of the affinities North American Baptists share with other branches of the church since the Reformation. He believes we have every right to “lay claim to the doctrinal legacy of the Reformation, the missionary and evangelistic impulse of the Great Awakening.” Along with these particular examples, George also highlights our connections with other denominations with whom we share “a common commitment to the Word of God and the task of world evangelization.”<sup>18</sup>

There is much to be gained from such reclamation of ecclesiastical history including a realization that the creeds and confessions of the past share the common high view of Scripture that beats in the heart of Baptists. “Protestant confessions have virtually always displayed and defended sole authority of Scripture and have resisted attempts to establish doctrines in any way except on its authority.”<sup>19</sup> When these confessions are studied in their historical context, what is uncovered is a great humility on the part of the crafters. This is witnessed through their reliance on Scripture and their respect for the dependence of Councils and Synods on the use of Scripture as well. “In actuality, history demonstrates that those who value their confessions also give the most

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<sup>17</sup> Tom J. Nettles, “Are Creeds Appropriate for Bible Believing Baptists?” *Founder’s Journal*, issue 3, fall/winter 1990-91, under “Objections Generally Considered.” [http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/journal/fj03/article2\\_fr.html](http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/journal/fj03/article2_fr.html) (accessed October 11, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Timothy George, “The Future of Baptist Theology,” in, *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 7.

<sup>19</sup> Nettles, “Creeds?” under “Contra Sola Scriptura?”

intense attention to Scripture and have the greatest regard for the purity and consistency of its doctrines.”<sup>20</sup>

Beyond this defense of the sole authority of Scripture, these creeds and confessions reveal that every generation will have its own theological issues to address. “To address doctrinal issues men needed to re-cast doctrine in a new mould, in new words, and use language that precisely addressed the error of the times.”<sup>21</sup> The fact that history reveals a recasting in new molds reveals that these generations built upon the foundations laid before them; those foundations were necessary, but so was the recasting. As we pass the mantle of church leadership to new generations, we must also pass a doctrinal foundation for them to build upon so they have a foundation and framework to recast their doctrinal assertions. Then, as they make new molds and use new words, we can increase our confidence that they will fundamentally remain orthodox. F. F. Bruce has observed that creeds, catechisms, and confessions, “provide guidelines for the interpretation and application of Scripture.”<sup>22</sup> Though secondary, these guidelines are vitally important for future generations.

George believes that the more we understand our heritage the more equipped we will be to “deal constructively with the issues and controversies we face today. This kind of retrieval will help us place in perspective some of the questions that still generate more heat than light within our own Southern Baptist fellowship.”<sup>23</sup> He maintains that we must

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<sup>20</sup> Nettles, “Creeds?” under “Contra Sola Scriptura.”

<sup>21</sup> Mark Sarver, “The Legitimacy and Function of Creeds.” <http://www.reformedreader.org/lfc.htm> (accessed October 21, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Tradition: Old and New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), 13.

<sup>23</sup> George, “Is Jesus a Baptist?” 93.

seek “retrieval for the sake of renewal.”<sup>24</sup> But is it possible for such retrieval to take place without compromising our Baptist distinctives? How can we have such a resurgence within our local churches that connects us to our heritage without turning our back on the very historic Baptist principles with which we are seeking to reconnect?

There is seldom a time within the life of the church when there is not a desire to see revival and renewal. Even during past times of revival visiting the church, leaders have prayed fervently that the revival would tarry and spread.<sup>25</sup> David S. Dockery lists twelve steps to renewal for Southern Baptists, including the following:

1. We must begin afresh to appreciate the best of Baptist history/heritage...6. A model of dynamic orthodoxy must be reclaimed. The orthodox tradition must be recovered in conversation with Nicea, Chalcedon, Augustine, Bernard, Luther, Calvin, Wesley, the Pietists, and the revivalists. In sum, our Southern Baptist identity must be rooted in the *consensus fidei* of the Christian church.<sup>26</sup>

The future of the Baptist movement must include a reconnection with the essentials of our past. Revival within our Baptist fellowships is critically rooted in redeeming our connection with the history of the Church. Without it we may lose our identity altogether.

## A New Reformation

The Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a call to put the Word of God in the hands of the common people, so they could read and study it for

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<sup>24</sup> George, “Is Jesus a Baptist?” 93.

<sup>25</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 200.

<sup>26</sup> David S. Dockery, “Introduction: Southern Baptists in the Twenty-first Century,” in *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future*, ed. David S. Dockery (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 18-19.



themselves in their native tongue. The Reformers' efforts have been reaping a fruitful harvest for hundreds of years, their influence continuing on through the centuries to drive a missionary passion to finish the task they began for every tribe, tongue, and nation.<sup>27</sup>

Currently, we stand in need of a new reformation and various voices within evangelicalism are calling out for it. Many believe we are facing a crisis of historic amnesia, which calls for us to put the history of the church back into the hands of the common people. This twenty-first century reformation will be one that hopes to recapture nearly two thousand years of God's working among his people, the Church.

Young and old alike have picked up the call for reformation. Among some younger evangelicals there is a desire to reconnect with a host of ancient traditions practiced in the church.<sup>28</sup> Some trends reveal that younger evangelicals are gravitating toward churches that actually help them connect with history through the use of liturgy within worship.<sup>29</sup> Seasoned evangelicals like the late Robert Webber have been trumpeting the clarion call of reviving ancient faith practices for several decades. His

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<sup>27</sup> Matthew 24:14. The following resources show the progress that has been made and the desire to finish the task. Electa Draper, "Bible Translators Hope to have Every Language Covered in 15 Years," *The Denver Post*, June 22, 2010, [http://www.denverpost.com/headlines/ci\\_15346948](http://www.denverpost.com/headlines/ci_15346948) (accessed, January 20, 2011). Stan Guthrie, "Wycliffe in Overdrive," *Christianity Today*, February 2005, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/february/28.74.html> (accessed, January 20, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002). This book provides an overview of some of the ways in which younger Christians are reconnecting with the ancient practices of the faith and why they have a desire to do so. Also see, Dan Kimball, *They Like Jesus but Not the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007). Gabe Lyons, *The Next Christians* (New York: Doubleday, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> Rob Marus and Marshall Allen, "Ancient Celtic Liturgy Makes a Comeback," *baptiststandard.com*, September 15, 1999, [http://www.baptiststandard.com/1999/9\\_15/pages/celtic.html](http://www.baptiststandard.com/1999/9_15/pages/celtic.html) (accessed June 24, 2011). Kate Shellnutt, "A Holy Week for all Christians: Evangelicals are making liturgical traditions their own," *Houston Chronicle*, April 22, 2011, <http://www.chron.com/dispatch/story.mpl/metropolitan/7533676.html#ixzz1QFkCwcIH> (accessed June 24, 2011). Ryan Hamm and Roxanne Weimann, "50 Ideas that Changed Everything," *Relevant Magazine*, issue 50 March/April 2011. Thom Turner, "The Turning Over of Traditional Tables," *christiancentury.com*, March 13, 2011, <http://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2011-05/turning-over-traditional-tables> (accessed June 24, 2011).

*Ancient Future* book series has been a helpful resource for many.<sup>30</sup> Thomas C. Oden has been another senior voice heralding this reformation through various projects including serving as editor of *The Ancient Christian Commentary* series.<sup>31</sup>

These trends are good. However, youthful interest in ancient practices disconnected from the truth that stands behind them and the context in which they were applied is a risky business. It threatens to create an atmosphere in which ambitious practitioners are susceptible to being swayed by anything and everything that is appealing no matter whether it is consistent with the witness of Scripture or not.

While some among rising generations are gravitating to historic church practices and finding a rich and vibrant faith, many others are choosing to abandon the church altogether. What is sobering is that the younger people who are leaving have grown up in the church and spent the majority of their formative years under the tutelage of Christian parents and other godly adults serving as teachers and volunteers. These young men and women are leaving the church at alarming rates.<sup>32</sup> Though many factors likely contribute

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<sup>30</sup> Titles in the series include: Robert, Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999). *Ancient-Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith-Forming Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003). *Ancient-Future Time: Forming Spirituality Through the Christian Year* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004). *Ancient-Future Worship: Proclaiming and Enacting God's Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008). *Common Roots: The Original Call to an Ancient-Future Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture CD-Rom Complete Set* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> “More than two-thirds of young churchgoing adults in America drop out of church between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two.” The results of a study of eighteen to thirty year olds in America who attended a Protestant church regularly for at least a year while they were in high school. Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer, *Essential Church* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 2. The estimated proportion of each generation reached for Christ has dropped significantly with each succeeding generation for the last four generations. Builders 65%, Boomers 35%, Busters 15%, Bridgers 4%. Thom S. Rainer, *The Bridger Generation* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 169. See also, Ron Luce, *Battle Cry for a Generation* (Colorado Springs, Co: NexGen, 2005). Josh McDowell and David H. Bellis, *The Last Christian Generation* (Holiday, FL: Green Key Books, 2006). Thom S. Rainer and Jess Rainer, *The Millenials: Connecting to America's Largest Generation* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2011). Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*

to this movement, our failure to anchor the faith of our children in its historic frame of reference, with vibrancy, needs to be considered as a key contribution.

Julia Duin provides both statistics and personal stories reinforcing the reality that churches are not effectively anchoring the next generation in the historic faith. An interview with Scott McConnell, Associate Director for Lifeway Christian Resources at the time, affirmed that even Southern Baptists were experiencing the exodus. What was most troubling about Duin's research was the fact that many of the younger people she interviewed were continuing to pursue their relationship with Jesus Christ and felt that they were having greater success without the albatross of the church. Her conclusion was, "Sunday mornings at church have become too banal, boring, or painful. Large groups of Christians are opting out of church because they find it impossible to stay."<sup>33</sup>

This may be because of what Kenda Creasy Dean identifies as the primary belief system being passed on by churches to our teenagers which she believes is best labeled "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism."<sup>34</sup> The question we face today in the church is not how to keep teenagers but whether the church really matters at all. Dean writes that the reason

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(New York: Oxford, 2010). Julia Duin, *Quitting Church: Why the Faithful are Fleeing and What to Do about It* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008). David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007). Drew Dyck, *Generation Ex-Christian: Why Young Adults Are Leaving the Faith and How to Bring Them Back* (Chicago: Moody, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> Duin, *Quitting Church*, 21.

<sup>34</sup> This label is based on the results of the National Study of Youth and Religion researching adolescent spirituality from 2003-2005 and, what she calls "a spate of smaller studies that largely echo its findings." Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian*, 3-4. Christian Smith, the principal investigator of the National Study of Youth and Religion, and Melinda Lundquist Denton, project manager of the National Study of Youth and Religion, define Moralistic Therapeutic Deism as, "First...about inculcating a moralistic approach to life....Second, about providing therapeutic benefits to its adherents....Finally...[it] is a belief in a particular kind of God: one who exists, created the world, and defines our general moral order, but not one who is particularly personally involved in one's affairs-especially affairs in which one would prefer not to have God involved." Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford, 2005), 162-164.

for this is because numerous research reveals the church's "inability to meaningfully share the core content of Christian faith..." and that the church "no longer addresses the issues of being human."<sup>35</sup> This failure on the part of the church conveys the sense that "God is therefore unimportant."<sup>36</sup> She contends that, aside from a few exceptions, the church has watered down our historic faith, having "traded the kind of faith confessed and embodied in the church's most long-standing traditions for the savory stew of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism."<sup>37</sup> If this is what we are passing on to our teenagers and children then no wonder they are searching elsewhere for a frame of reference for their faith.

The handwriting is on the wall. If current trends in church attendance, giving, and retention of adolescents transitioning into adulthood<sup>38</sup> continue at their current rate, or snowball out of control, it may not be an exaggeration to postulate that the evangelical church in America risks total extinction within as little as one generation. As we stand at our own crossroad and look for the right path<sup>39</sup> to continue forward and reverse this crisis, a renewed connection with the past is in order. In the midst of fears among some of the older generations that we are losing our connection with the recent past and its familiar comfortable traditions, we are quickly losing all connection with our progeny as

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<sup>35</sup> Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian*, 9-10.

<sup>36</sup> Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian*, 9-10.

<sup>37</sup> Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian*, 9-10.

<sup>38</sup> Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey Reveals a Fluid and Diverse Pattern of Faith." February 25, 2008. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/743/united-states-religion> (accessed March 7, 2011). Full copy of the report, "U. S. Religious Landscape Survey, Religious Affiliation: Diverse and Dynamic, February 2008." Available at, <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf> (accessed March 7, 2011).

<sup>39</sup> Jeremiah 6:16.

they search for other connections with a “higher power.” Historically, similar times have prompted evangelicals to produce large quantities of confessions of faith - confessions that reiterate the faith once delivered for all the saints.<sup>40</sup> These historic confessions drew fresh attention to the truths that is right in front of the people of that generation, firmly anchoring them there.

Even for Baptists this call for reformation may better be described as reacquainting ourselves with a lost practice. Baptists have historically joined in the active proliferation of confessions during tumultuous times. “Baptist confessions were more than simple descriptions of belief. They enabled collective self- and world-understanding by emergent movements in unsettled times.”<sup>41</sup> These confessions were built upon the legacy of earlier generations of Christians, including those outside the Baptist persuasion.

Their testimony affirms that in order to come out on the other side of this crisis stronger and wiser, we must stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. Their conclusions can serve as helpful tools in our own faith journey. We likely face similar issues, as well as some unique ones, too. The necessity for us, like each preceding generation, is to wrestle with issues and the authoritative answers provided by Scripture and, then, clearly articulate those answers for our generation. By doing so, we join the voice of former generations and share their passion for Jesus Christ and His Great Commission to the Church. The hope is that the ultimate result will be each

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<sup>40</sup> William L. Lumpkin, "The Nature and Authority of Baptist Confessions of Faith," *Review & Expositor* 76.1 (1979): 17-28. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*. EBSCO (accessed December 30, 2010).

<sup>41</sup> Philip E. Thompson, "Seventeenth-Century Baptist Confessions in Context." *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 29, no. 4 (December 1, 2002): 335-348. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 17, 2010).

generation producing materials that will stand upon our ongoing faith heritage while communicating in the here and now with relevance to the set of issues being addressed in its time.

It may seem out of place for a Baptist speaking to Baptists to proposing the production of more man-made materials, even with historic Baptist evidence pointing to its practice, since we believe that Scripture is the answer for everything. Historically, the ultimate authority of Scripture has been a bedrock doctrine for Baptists, even when approaching the development of confessions and other man-made materials. “[T]he Baptists were second to none in standing without compromise”<sup>42</sup> for an emphasis on the Bible as the sure and only rule of faith and practice. “Baptists have historically regarded the Bible as the ultimate authority generally for all truth in general and specifically for matters of faith and practice.”<sup>43</sup> Though Baptists have been enormously diverse on the secondary distinctives<sup>44</sup> of biblical authority, this has not negatively impacted their unity

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<sup>42</sup> William L. Lumpkin, “The Bible in Early Baptist Confessions of Faith,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 19.3 (1984): 33-41. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*. EBSCO (accessed, December 31, 2010).

<sup>43</sup> R. Stanton Norman, *The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005) 31. John Allen captures well the Baptist sentiment for the Bible in the following words, “Is the word of God precious to your soul? Are the promises like pearls, and the blessings of the gospel as living springs to thy mind, more to be desired than gold? Is it thy feast, thy joy, and thy life? Dost thou search therein, as for hid treasures? Is the centre of thy soul the volume of the book? Is this the divine field where thy thoughts range?” The 19<sup>th</sup> century English Baptist continues, “Thus the scriptures are precious, as they are a revelation of the ground of eternal hope, the guide of life, the fuel of devotion, and the treasure of infinite provisions; are they not the subject of contemplation, the lamp of life, and life of our souls, light to the blind, feet to the lame, counsel to the enquirer, strength to the weak, comfort to the mourner, bread to the hungry, living waters to the thirsty, wine to revive us, a staff to support us, flaggons to supply us, meat for men, and milk for babes?” John Allen, *A Dissertation on the Glory and Excellence of the Scriptures* (London: E. Justins, 1816), 3 & 9 (microfilmed copy), as quoted in John E. Steely, “Biblical Authority and Baptists in Historical Perspective,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 19, no. 3 (July 1, 1984): 7-15. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 4, 2010).

<sup>44</sup> Walter B. Shurden, *Not a Silent People: Controversies that Have Shaped Southern Baptists* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1972), 103 – 119, and Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1971), 7 – 17 for an example from the Southern Baptist

surrounding the ultimate authority of the Bible.<sup>45</sup> As a matter of fact, one Baptist writer has observed, “They have not creed, yet they enjoy a remarkable unity...they share a unity in diversity. The unity is a living faith and an abiding message.”<sup>46</sup> So should not this be enough to confront any challenge we face? Further, if we are facing an identity crisis, should not Scripture be where we turn to reclaim our identity? These are valid questions to be sure.

In order to flesh out answers to these questions we can start by looking at our actions, which are not necessarily reflecting our affirmations. Though Baptists profess to be people of the Bible, dependent solely on the Scripture, it has been observed that “the actual amount of biblical material read in a typical Baptist service often is considerably less than what is read in the typical services of other denominations.”<sup>47</sup> This is particularly true of denominations who profess adherence to the historic creeds of the church and see their confessions of faith as authoritative manuals of doctrine rather than simply historically descriptive.<sup>48</sup> We noted earlier that the most astute adherents of

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Convention. An example from the American Baptist Church, USA can be found at, Rob Moll, “American Baptist Exodus,” *Christianity Today*, November 2005, vol. 49, no. 11, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/november/2.23.html> (accessed December 27, 2010).

<sup>45</sup> Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 1. Though their diversity on the secondary issues does reveal that the unity on the primary issue of the ultimate authority of the Bible leaves plenty of wiggle room for various interpretations of the Scriptures in the opinion of the author of this paper.

<sup>46</sup> Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message*, 7.

<sup>47</sup> John E. Steely, “Biblical Authority and Baptists in Historical Perspective.” *Baptist History and Heritage* 19, no. 3 (July 1, 1984): 7-15. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 4, 2010).

<sup>48</sup> Presbyterians and Lutherans serve as legitimate examples of utilizing large portions of Scripture during their worship gatherings while also including recitations of historic Creeds and denominational Confessions.

biblical authority with the loftiest views of Scripture are actually those who first value Scripture but also value their confessions secondarily.<sup>49</sup>

This lofty view seems to be getting lost somewhere in translation. We live in a time when the Bible is readily accessible in America, yet it is grossly overlooked. We are a culture that is super-saturated with Bible translations and materials of all sorts seeking to explain and enlighten the message of Scripture for us. Still, it is fair to say that we greatly under-utilize the Bible and these supplemental materials.

The Reformers wanted to place the Bible in the hands of the people in their common language. For centuries the Bible had not been accessible to the common person. Even at church, when the Bible was used, it was spoken in Latin, a language that few, if any, parishioners understood. Even many of the priests reciting it did not even understand. The average person was at the mercy of the clergy when it came to understanding what the Bible taught. Sadly, corruption had, in large measure, infiltrated the church and poisoned the message of Scripture. The Reformers were convinced if they could get the Scriptures in the hands of the people, then the people would read the Bible for themselves and see the truth. Then, as Jesus said, the truth would set them free.<sup>50</sup>

We now have the Bible in the hands of the people and still there is a struggle to see people grow spiritually or even explain what growing spiritually means.<sup>51</sup> The

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<sup>49</sup> Nettles, “Creeds?” under “Contra Sola Scriptura.” See also, Steely, “Biblical Authority and Baptists.”

<sup>50</sup> John 8:32.

<sup>51</sup> Barna Update, May 11, 2009, “Many Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity,” <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/264-many-churchgoers-and-faith-leaders-struggle-to-define-spiritual-maturity?q=leaving+church> (accessed September 2, 2010).



average church-goer is often unable to explain spiritual growth in the most basic and general concepts from the Bible - let alone reference particular passages of Scripture. The degree of biblical illiteracy within our churches is staggering,<sup>52</sup> not to mention the degree of biblical illiteracy outside the four walls of the church. It seems, for some, the idea of no creed but the Bible has become a ruse to hide the lack of depth and biblical literacy that is so rampant in our congregations.

In our legitimate and healthy concern to preserve the ultimate authority of the Bible over and against man-made traditions and religious opinions, we have been generally clear and consistent concerning the importance of the Bible. We have not been nearly as clear about the importance we Baptists place on our relationship to our history specifically, and church history, in general. This includes the history of our own local fellowships, and it is especially true in reference to the written creedal and confessional heritage of the church.

Baptists' tradition of no creed but the Bible has created an atmosphere that has been described by the writers of each version of the *Baptist Faith and Message* as an aversion to any creed but the Bible.<sup>53</sup> Adherence to this principle varies greatly. Some hold with staunch inflexibility to this principle to the point of refusing to give any

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<sup>52</sup> Barna Update, December 13, 2010, "Six Megathemes Emerge from Barna Group Research in 2010," <http://www.barna.org/culture-articles/462-six-megathemes-emerge-from-2010> (accessed January 13, 2011). Barna Update, "Barna Studies the Research, Offers a Year-in-Review Perspective," <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/325-barna-studies-the-research-offers-a-year-in-review-perspective?q=bible+literacy> (accessed September 2, 2010).

<sup>53</sup> Full text for all three versions including Preambles can be found at, The Southern Baptist Convention, "The Baptist Faith and Message," <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfmcomparison.asp> (accessed October 4, 2010). See specifically the 5 points delineated under the heading "statement of the historic Baptist conception of the nature and function of confessions of faith in our religious and denominational life." These 5 statements clearly lay out the historic stance of the Southern Baptist Convention concerning the authority of the Bible versus the authority of man-made doctrinal statements in the form of confessions of faith.

credence to anything man made. Baptist historian Thomas Armitage expresses this inflexibility:

[T]he book called the Bible is given by the inspiration of God, and is the only rule of Christian faith and practice. The consequence is, that we have no creeds, nor catechisms, nor decretals, which bind us by their authority. We think a creed worth nothing, unless it is supported by Scriptural authority, and if the creed is founded on the word of God, we do not see why we should not rest on that word which props up the creed; we prefer to go back directly to the foundation itself and rest there alone. If it is able to sustain us, we need nothing else, and if it is not, then we cannot rest upon a creed to support us when that creed has no support for itself.<sup>54</sup>

Much of what Armitage presents has validity; however, it may have served him, and others who hold similar sentiments, to stop a little earlier in his thought process. The history of the church reveals there have been times when it was necessary for the church to rest not only on the foundation of Scripture but also upon the collective voice of the church as well, summarizing with laser clarity the message of Scripture.<sup>55</sup> Our current cultural climate in America, and the American church, lends itself to promoting, even idolizing, individualism and novelty. In such a climate a stance that aligns with Armitage's profession, taken to its logical conclusion, could potentially do more harm than good.

Others within Baptist circles are crying out for a greater authority to be given to creeds and confessions. The arguments from this camp are quite often prefaced with a desire to remain true to the Baptist heritage. They posit that what is actually being proposed is a return to the authentic practices and principles of the earliest Baptists. Here

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas Armitage, "Baptist Faith and Practice," in *Baptist Doctrines*, C. A. Jenkyns, ed., (St. Louis, MO: Chancy R. Barns, 1882), 34.

<sup>55</sup> The Nicene Creed (325) and the definitions of the Council of Chalcedon (451) are examples from the history of the church.

is an example: "It is not sufficient, therefore, merely to affirm that the Bible is our creed. We must open the book and state what we believe it teaches." Odle continues, "If we can affirm that the Bible, with its many thousands of words, is our creed, according to the Baptist use of that term, why cannot we condense its teachings into briefer statements, which we also can affirm as our doctrinal position."<sup>56</sup>

It is imperative that regardless of which side of this debate we fall on that we remember the importance of the identity crisis in which we find ourselves. Our desire must be to reconnect with the historic Baptist frame of reference rather than compromise it. As conscientious Baptists seeking to reverse current trends and reclaim a strong sense of identity, we must be careful not to become binding in our confessional statements - a move away from a historic Baptist position. Leonard writes, "As Baptists write more specific doctrinal statements, will they seek to make these formulas more binding upon constituents? If so, a serious "identity crisis" regarding the relationship of present day Baptists with their heritage could develop."<sup>57</sup> These are wise words, words that force us to wrestle to find a third way to move forward. The challenge is to seek a way that engages a connection to our Baptist roots<sup>58</sup> with more intentionality that will build strong theological foundations and vibrant faith while maintaining integrity in our Baptist identity as well.

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<sup>56</sup> Joe T. Odle, "Should Southern Baptists have a Creed/Confession - Yes." *Review & Expositor* 76, no. 1 (December 1, 1979): 89-94. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 2, 2010). See also, Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006).

<sup>57</sup> William J. Leonard, "Types of Confessional Documents among Baptists." *Review & Expositor* 76.1 (1979): 29-42. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*. EBSCO (accessed, December 31, 2010).

<sup>58</sup> In the context of this paper Baptist roots include the inheritance of the Early Church. The Baptist vision is rooted in the testimony of the Early Church as well.

It is worth the effort required to carry out this endeavor. Robert Rayburn explains why: “The tradition of biblical interpretation distilled and concentrated in the creeds is a hard-won and precious part of any Christian’s inheritance.”<sup>59</sup> Even the historic confessions of the Baptist faith, though not authoritative or binding, are incredibly beneficial for us today. They “reflect certain conditions faced by given bodies in definite times and places.”<sup>60</sup> Studying these confessions can provide us with a framework for approaching similar issues as they arise in our own context. In spite of the fact that these documents are not authoritative they reveal to us an amazing “unity of basic beliefs held by Baptists everywhere.”<sup>61</sup>

Benjamin B. Warfield believed and advocated that anyone who wished to grow strong spiritually should read the creeds of the church alongside the Bible. One of the several reasons he promoted this was “because the truth is set forth in these Creeds with a clearness and richness with which it is set forth nowhere else.” Warfield concluded his defense of Creeds calling them, “the compressed and weighted utterances of the Christian heart.”<sup>62</sup> For those of the Baptist stripe it is time we embrace and tap into these weighted utterances of the Christian heart with a much great urgency and intentionality.

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<sup>59</sup> Robert S. Rayburn, “Biblical and Pastoral Basis for Creeds and Confessions,” *Premise* vol.III, number 3, March 29, 1996. <http://www.reformedreader.org/bpcc.htm> (accessed, September 30, 2010).

<sup>60</sup> Herschel H. Hobbs, “Southern Baptists and Confessionalism: a Comparison of the Origins and Contents of the 1925 and 1963 Confessions,” *Review & Expositor* 76.1 (1979): 55-68. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*. EBSCO (accessed, December 31, 2010).

<sup>61</sup> Hobbs, “Southern Baptists and Confessionalism.” 55.

<sup>62</sup> Benjamin B. Warfield, “Spiritual Culture in the Theological Seminary,” in *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Nutley, N.J: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970) 492-493.

## An Old Appreciation

Staying true to our Baptist *understanding* of the use of history is not the only challenge we face in the effort to move forward by looking back to a re-establishment with our Baptist identity. We must also seek to regain an *appreciation* for our history as well. Mention a study of history, particularly church history, and the percentage of individuals who get excited at the thought will be relatively small. There are few people who are enthusiastic about endless lists of dates they are unable to remember, names they cannot pronounce, and locations they fail to recognize. When these are the associations most people have with studying church history, no wonder it is viewed negatively. Add to that our fascination with all things “fresh” and “new,” and what is left is a recipe for a lack of appreciation for the value of church history to our daily lives and particularly our spiritual development.

Our fascination with that which is supposedly fresh and new may actually be a result of our own misunderstandings. “Much that passes for the newest, novel philosophies of our time is actually a legacy of the past – primarily not the distant past but the recent past.”<sup>63</sup> In reality what is often deemed fresh and new is nothing more than a dependence on our past, shortsighted as it may be. In essence, then, what happens is we mistake our shortsightedness for novelty and newness. We could therefore argue that we have more of a connection with our heritage than we realize, albeit a relatively shallow connection.

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<sup>63</sup> Art Lindsley, “C. S. Lewis on Chronological Snobbery,” *Knowing & Doing*, Spring 2003 <http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/files/webfm/aboutcslewis/LewisChronologicalSnobbery.pdf> (accessed October 26, 2010).

Before we go patting ourselves on the back for this, we must acknowledge that for all the positives we could draw from this masked connection to our past, it is certainly not a vibrant and healthy connection. Without some healthy connection to our heritage what results is that “we only spend time with people our own age, who look like us, who think like us.”<sup>64</sup> We may argue there is nothing wrong with working within the natural cycle of affinity groups, but the truth is if that is all the broader our influences reach, “we’re only perpetuating our own ignorance.”<sup>65</sup> The longer we remain in this state, willingly or ignorantly, the more likely we are to succumb to what C. S. Lewis labeled “chronological snobbery.” He described this as, “the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited.”<sup>66</sup>

Lewis wrote the following in promotion of valuing old ideas: “Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books.”<sup>67</sup> We could add “old ideas,” as well. Even with the power of peer pressure and the social institutions that reinforce its influence on the next generation, Lewis’ belief is still true today - each generation is taught by an earlier generation. But to really enrich the youngest generations and instill in them the wisdom to see beyond today’s novelties we must reach beyond the recent

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<sup>64</sup> Andrew Hedges, “Generations of Faith.” MorningStar Baptist Church. Sunday, October 10, 2010, MP3 file, <http://www.morningstardayton.org/resources/audio/2010/10/11/generations-faith> (accessed November 12, 2010).

<sup>65</sup> Hedges, “Generations of Faith.”

<sup>66</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, 1955), 207-208.

<sup>67</sup> C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 202.

past. “It’s not a question of whether the past will affect us but which past – the recent past or more distant past.... Those who neglect past history tend to be enslaved to the recent past.”<sup>68</sup>

Our lack of appreciation for the value of history only heightens the sense of autonomy our culture of individualism already promotes.<sup>69</sup> For those who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ, this is not only dangerous, it is unbiblical. We cannot deny the importance of taking personal responsibility for our spiritual life and development. However, we must not exalt personal responsibility at the expense of the biblical reality that as redeemed children of God we are now part of a much larger connected community known as the body of Christ.<sup>70</sup> As such, we must confess the Bible teaches both the importance of our individual responsibility and culpability *and* our need to maintain healthy connections with the body of Christ past, present, and future.

When we combine the individualism of our culture and our indifference to history with a third element, it creates something of a perfect storm. This third element is the break neck blitzkrieg of information and technology we currently experience on a daily basis.<sup>71</sup> With information traveling faster and farther now than ever before we have

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<sup>68</sup> Lindsley, “C. S. Lewis on Chronological Snobbery.”

<sup>69</sup> Herbert Hoover, *American Individualism* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Page & Co, 1922), see also, Edward Grabb, Douglas Baer and James Curtis, “The Origins of American Individualism: Reconsidering the Historical Evidence,” *The Canadian Journal of Sociology / Cahiers canadiens de sociologie*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (Autumn, 1999), pp. 511-533. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3341789> (accessed October 11, 2010). William Harms, “America’s individualist culture influences the ability to view others’ perspectives,” *University of Chicago Chronicle*, volume 26, no. 19, July 12, 2007, <http://chronicle.uchicago.edu/070712/perspectives.shtml> (accessed October 11, 2010).

<sup>70</sup> Ephesians 2:11-22, see also, 1 Corinthians 12:12-14, 27-28; Ephesians 1:22-23.

<sup>71</sup> Roger E. Bohn and James E. Short, “How Much Information? 2009. Report on American Consumers,” (San Diego, CA: Global Information Industry Center, December 2009, updated January 2010. [http://hmi.ucsd.edu/pdf/HMI\\_2009\\_ConsumerReport\\_Dec9\\_2009.pdf](http://hmi.ucsd.edu/pdf/HMI_2009_ConsumerReport_Dec9_2009.pdf) (accessed October 11, 2010).

created a very small world. News and information travel almost instantaneously in today's culture, creating challenges never faced before in the history of the world.<sup>72</sup>

The local church has never before had to address many of the current issues it faces nor address them so rapidly. For decades the average local church remained relatively the same in its fellowship, worship, and programming from generation to generation. Because of the slower pace of change, transferring identity was relatively easier and more natural. The décor and furnishings of a church building did not change much from generation to generation unless things wore out. Hymnals provided the congregation with their source of church songs, and, like furnishings, they remained with the local church long after they were wearing out. Even when changes did take place for a local congregation, the rate was much slower and usually was driven by internal motivations. Today there is incredible external pressure on the local church as attendants are bombarded through radio, television, internet, and experience. Pastors must “compete” with radio and television preachers. Instead of a selection limited to the four to five hundred songs that will fit in a hymnal, musicians and song leaders now face what seems to be an infinite string of songs to choose from, ranging from old to new to newer, while not deviating too far from the unspoken lists of favorites residing in the minds of all those attending worship.

Congregations face these challenges as well. Pastors fill their minds with podcasts and conferences seeking to grow churches that reach the masses and glorify God while maintaining a holy trendiness, all resulting in more and faster change. If ministries are to keep up, then they must keep moving forward. For those desperately hoping to revisit and remain in the “good ‘ole days” this has occasioned them to fight for the

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<sup>72</sup> Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985).



familiar that is rapidly slipping away. For those screaming for innovation, a skepticism of the past is created, and we become more and more disconnected from some of the most valuable tools we possess for revival and renewal in our congregations.

This is perhaps more evident in congregations of the Free Church tradition, like Baptists, than any other because of the nature of free churches. The autonomy of the local congregation is one of the identifying marks of free churches. This helps safeguard against the abuse of ecclesial power and continually positions ministries to practically live out the priesthood of the believer, but, at the same time, it provides no source of intentional connections to the congregation's faith heritage. Local congregations can be encouraged to consider such things, but in the current climate of American life such encouragement seems to most frequently fall on deaf ears. What is resulting is a growing chasm between our history and us, resulting in a growing disconnect from our identity as Baptists.

While few would deny that our churches must venture into the future, the method of the journey is debatable. Yet, how we take this journey is critical to the life of our churches. David Wells has observed that many are making this trek in a dangerous way in which the past is seen as dead weight that must be left behind for the sake of making room for innovations that better illuminate truth and make life better. Many believe that cutting edge is superior, so there is a purposeful disconnect from the past and its once indispensable values, considering them nothing more than dead weight. Wells calls this the conceit of modernity. It is a conceit that blinds many to the reality that, though this generation possesses so much more knowledge than previous generations, they were "often comparatively more human, more serious, and more profound"; whereas, our lives

are characterized by “emptiness, superficiality, banality, and destructiveness.”<sup>73</sup> These are the characteristics of crisis and our current trajectory is one of lost identity.

### **A Vital Reconnection**

The current climate in which we carry out ministry is clearly unique and will require that we face today’s challenges with godly wisdom if we are to pass along the torch to succeeding generations. The perfect storm that is brewing threatens to strip Baptist churches of their identity. In order to avoid this, it is imperative that we formulate ways to intentionally connect our congregations to our Baptist history and the larger ecclesiastical history in such a way that remains faithful to the convictions that make us uniquely Baptist.<sup>74</sup> Throughout the history of Baptists we have been towing a

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<sup>73</sup> David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 146-147.

<sup>74</sup> Some of the key beliefs that combine to establish the uniquely Baptist position are: soul competency, which is defined by the Southern Baptist Convention as, “the accountability of each person before God. Your family cannot save you. Neither can your church. It comes down to you and God. Authorities can't force belief or unbelief. They shouldn't try.” Southern Baptist Convention Position Statement on Soul Competency, <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/psoul.asp> (accessed June 29, 2011). The priesthood of the believer, which is defined by the Southern Baptist Convention as, “Laypersons have the same right as ordained ministers to communicate with God, interpret Scripture, and minister in Christ's name. That is why the Convention requires strong lay involvement on its boards. This doctrine is first and foremost a matter of responsibility and servanthood, not privilege and license. It is of course, a perversion of this doctrine to say that all views are equally valid, that you can believe anything and still be a Baptist or that the pastor has no unique leadership role.” Southern Baptist Convention Position Statement on the Priesthood of All Believers, <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/pspriesthood.asp> (accessed June 29, 2011). Religious liberty, which is defined by the Southern Baptist Convention as, “Church and state should be separate. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the pursuit of its spiritual ends. In providing for such freedom no ecclesiastical group or denomination should be favored by the state more than others.” *The Baptist Faith and Message*, (2000), Article XVII. Religious Liberty, (Nashville, TN: Lifeway, 2000), 20. Autonomy, which is defined by the Southern Baptist Convention as, “The autonomy of the local church. Each church is free to determine its own membership and to set its own course under the headship of Jesus. It may enter into alliance with other churches as it chooses, so long as those other churches are willing. The same is true for other Baptist bodies – local associations; state conventions; national conventions. They, too, may determine their membership and set their own course. If, in its autonomy, a Baptist body expels a church from its fellowship, it does not negate that church's autonomy. The church is perfectly free to go on with its business – but not as a member of that larger Baptist body.” Southern Baptist Convention Position Statement on Autonomy, <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/psautonomy.asp> (accessed June 29, 2011). Believer’s Baptism, which is defined by the Southern Baptist Convention as, “The immersion of a believer in water....It is an act of

risky line between seeking to remain faithful to the roots of our Baptist heritage while passing those roots on to succeeding generations. Because of our high view of Scripture and its authority,<sup>75</sup> coupled with our aversion to abuses of man-made religious documents in the past, we may be facing the loss of effective connections to our denominational history in just a few short generations. Somehow we must find a way to preserve our understanding of the authority of Scripture and combine it with a more intentional appreciation and use of our spiritual heritage. Each generation of Baptists has made efforts to live out their Baptist identity within the times in which they lived. Each season has been unique and demanded a unique approach. Baptist ideals allow for this generation to do the same.

Isaac Backus serves as a solid example of living out his Baptist identity in the times in which he lived. Backus did not grow up in a Baptist home but came from Congregational roots. He grew up in colonial New England during the years leading up to the American Revolution. His spiritual journey and study of the Scriptures led him to

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obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Saviour, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the old life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus." *The Baptist Faith and Message* (2000), Article VII. Baptism and the Lord's Supper (Nashville, TN: Lifeway, 2000), 14. The ultimate authority of Scripture, which is defined by the Southern Baptist Convention as, "all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried." *The Baptist Faith and Message* (2000), Article I. The Scriptures (Nashville, TN: Lifeway, 2000), 7.

<sup>75</sup> Article 1 of the Baptist Faith and Message (2000) states of the Scriptures, "The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter. Therefore, all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. It reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried. All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, who is Himself the focus of divine revelation." Exodus 24:4; Deuteronomy 4:1-2; 17:19; Joshua 8:34; Psalms 19:7-10; 119:11,89,105,140; Isaiah 34:16; 40:8; Jeremiah 15:16; 36:1-32; Matthew 5:17-18; 22:29; Luke 21:33; 24:44-46; John 5:39; 16:13-15; 17:17; Acts 2:16ff.; 17:11; Romans 15:4; 16:25-26; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 4:12; 1 Peter 1:25; 2 Peter 1:19-21. The author of this paper fully agrees with this statement of the authority of Scripture. <http://www.sbc.net/bfm/bfm2000.asp> (accessed January 6, 2011).

espouse Baptist distinctives. Backus' acceptance of the Baptist position meant that he found himself in a situation that invited abuse and alienation because he pastored churches that were not considered a part of the religious establishment. Historically, it is his contribution to changing these circumstances that have burned his name into the fabric of American history. His work for the cause of religious liberty makes up one stream of the overall river that ultimately resulted in the acceptance of religious liberty in America.

Yet, this work, largely historical in nature, was not written by a politician for political reasons but by a local pastor as a shepherd of a flock of God's children. Isaac Backus used a balanced combination of church history and the Scriptures to address the pressing needs of his congregation, in his specific context, at his particular time in history. By understanding the faith heritage of his forefathers, Backus was able to make significant contributions not only for his church or even for the church at large but also for a budding nation.

If we are to emulate this journey it will require an understanding of the historical context in which the Baptist movement was birthed. One cannot study Baptist history without recognizing the fact that the Baptist movement began, in part, because of abuse and exploitation of tradition and ecclesiastical authority. If we forget this, then we are in serious danger of compromising one of the core convictions that make us Baptist. This means that history cannot be granted status that would restrict religious freedom, ultimate authority of the Bible, or ecclesiastical autonomy of the local church. However, even in uncovering this truth one can see that there is a well-spring of ecclesiastical heritage that can provide an almost inestimable benefit to this and future generations if only we can

reconnect and remain connected to our heritage in a way that is responsible, humble, and biblical. There are few issues we face in the church today that some event in the history of the church cannot address with a great deal of relevance. Sadly, much of the wealth of information has been lost in the annals of history or written off as irrelevant. History may be littered with accounts of abuse and exploitation, but that does not mean that we should resist any and all connections with ecclesiastical history. The cost of that choice is much too high, and the truth is, there is the risk of exploitation inherent no matter what the resource we possess and utilize.<sup>76</sup> There must be a more beneficial and biblical approach to intentionally utilizing our history as a tool for revival and spiritual growth than our current methodology.

A change is called for because these connections to our history are more than descriptive but less than prescriptive. Moving forward necessitates an honest assessment of ourselves and our effectiveness. One Baptist author has observed that the current interaction between contemporary Baptists and our confessional heritage is rooted in ambivalence. We are torn asunder by a desire to preserve our heritage without granting that heritage authority that would be “antithetical to that heritage.” We must always realize that “Baptists collected their confessions for the sake of historical interest, not to provide an authoritative manual of doctrine.”<sup>77</sup> Rather than advocate an entirely descriptive or prescriptive approach, the Baptist church would be better served to see the

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<sup>76</sup> Nearly every new religious movement has at the root of their beliefs some teachings from the Old and/or New Testament.

<sup>77</sup> Philip E. Thompson, "Seventeenth-Century Baptist Confessions in Context," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 29, no. 4 (December 1, 2002): 335-348. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 17, 2010).

man-made tools as gracious gifts of God to be used for His glory, the advancement of the church, and the retention of our Baptist identity.

God, through Scripture, has affirmed the value and necessity of pursuing and transmitting a healthy connection with the spiritual legacy of our faith. Scripture is the primary and foundational connection we possess in this pursuit. Biblical history and the biblical record of the redemption story is our most essential link to our spiritual legacy. It has been affirmed so eloquently and repeatedly by Baptists of the past and present - the Bible is the framework by which we measure all other accounts of the church and history. Just because the church makes a statement does not mean we should advocate and adopt that statement. The church has missed the mark on many occasions: the Crusades, the Middle Ages, events leading up to the Reformation, slavery, and so on. Yet, history understood in the shadow of the Bible is an incredibly powerful tool. The history of the church can serve as a megaphone and magnifying glass, amplifying and intensifying the messages and principles found within the pages of Scripture. For all the times the church has gotten things wrong there are many times the church has gotten things right.

By looking at both - the errors and accuracies - in light of Scripture we can learn and build upon our rich and storied heritage to continue to fulfill our Great Commission mandate from generation to generation. There is something to be said for the wisdom in approaching our faith as a relay race, picking up the baton from previous generations, rather than as an individual race with each of us starting anew in the starting blocks and running solo.

It will serve us well to realize that a “fear of creeds is, largely, an irrational fear.”<sup>78</sup> The nature of our faith is such that we will have a confession one way or another because Christianity is not blind faith but faith with content; it is a confessing religion. “The option for Christians is not whether they will confess their faith or conceal it, but whether their confessions will be made in oral or written form.”<sup>79</sup> It is critical to acknowledge “everyone has a creed. A person’s creed governs every action and choice he or she makes, whether he or she is conscious of it or not. The way one lives is absolutely determined by the things one believes.”<sup>80</sup> That being the case, we are faced with a critical question, “Does a conscientious use of a Confession of Faith usurp the rightful place of Scripture in one’s faith and practice?”<sup>81</sup> Though there have been occasions historically in which a confession of faith has served to usurp Scripture,<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Lumpkin, “The Nature and Authority of Baptist Confessions,” 26.

<sup>79</sup> Lumpkin, “The Nature and Authority of Baptist Confessions,” 26.

<sup>80</sup> Lumpkin, “The Nature and Authority of Baptist Confessions,” 27.

<sup>81</sup> Nettles, “Creeds?” under “Contra Sola Scriptura.”

<sup>82</sup> Nettles references the Council of Trent which claimed the pope alone has the right to interpret Scripture and places unwritten tradition alongside Scripture. In the Fourth Session of the Council of Trent it is written of the authority of the church, “Furthermore, in order to restrain petulant spirits, It decrees, that no one, relying on his own skill, shall,--in matters of faith, and of morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, --wresting the sacred Scripture to his own senses, presume to interpret the said sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which holy mother Church,--whose it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the holy Scriptures,--hath held and doth hold;” *The Council of Trent the Fourth Session the Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, trans. J. Waterworth (London: Dolman, 1848), 19. <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct23.html> (accessed February 2, 2010). The groundwork for Papal infallibility is rooted in Pope Boniface VIII’s Bull, Unam Sanctam. 1302, which declared, “However, one sword ought to be subordinated to the other and temporal authority, subjected to spiritual power. For since the Apostle said: ‘There is no power except from God and the things that are, are ordained of God’ [Rom 13:1-2], but they would not be ordained if one sword were not subordinated to the other and if the inferior one, as it were, were not led upwards by the other....Furthermore, we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff.” *Internet Medieval Sourcebook*, ed. Paul Halsall, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/b8-unam.html> (accessed February 3, 2010). The Council of Trent presented the following official decree declaring the place of the authority of tradition over against Scripture, “The holy, ecumenical and general Council of Trent...keeps this constantly in view, namely, that the purity of the Gospel may be preserved in the Church after the errors have been removed....It also

Nettles observes that, “Protestant confessions have virtually always displayed and defended the sole authority of Scripture and have resisted attempts to establish doctrines in any way except on its authority. Scripture quotations and Scripture proofs encourage the reader to examine the assertions of the confession in light of those biblical texts.”<sup>83</sup>

If we choose to continue to half-heartedly acknowledge the labors of our forefathers handed down to us in the form of creeds, confessions, and catechisms, then we are basically passing along to our descendants an attitude that shows indifference for roughly 2,000 years of God’s activity in church history. Keep in mind the old adage: What one generation does in moderation the next does in excess. If this holds true, then our children will see less justification to connect their children with their faith heritage. In order to right the ship, reverse this identity crisis, and claim our Baptist identity with veracity we must shed our apathy and indifference toward the ventures of our forefathers and use them with biblical integrity and passionate intentionality.

Most would agree that promoting an attitude of indifference toward 2,000 years of God’s activity in history is not the intent behind a stand upon the sole authority of Scripture. Few would say it in principle; however, it has become the practice for far too many. Ours is a faith shared with the saints of the Old and New Testament. It is also a faith shared with the saints of every age throughout history who reside throughout the

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clearly perceives that these truths and rules are contained in the written books and unwritten traditions which have come down to us, having been received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ himself....Following, then, the example of the orthodox Fathers, it receives and venerates with the same piety and reverence all the books of both the Old and New Testaments – for God is the author of both – together with all traditions concerning faith and morals, for they come from the mouth of Christ or are inspired by the Holy Spirit and have been preserved in continuous succession in the Catholic Church.” Josef Neuner, S.J., and Heinrich Roos, S.J., *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, ed. Karl Rahner, S.J. (Staten Island, NY: Alba, 1967), 59, as quoted in Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1989), 528.

<sup>83</sup> Nettles, “Creeds?” under “Contra Sola Scriptura.”



world. Holding to Scripture alone as the sole authority does not mean we need to disconnect and disregard those saints not attested to in Scripture. That approach will set the stage for a shedding of our identity as Baptists, and that is not something that most of us who hold to the sole authority of the Bible are advocating. Furthermore, that is not the testimony of Scripture. Scripture posits multigenerational faith that is deeply rooted in the stories and legacy of our forefathers throughout history.

## CHAPTER 2

### FAMILY TREE

And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

-Matthew 13:52 ESV

One of my pet projects is tracing our family’s genealogy. My motivation for beginning and finishing the project is my children. I want to pass our family genealogy along to them as a gift that connects them to their ancestry, their roots. My plan is to present it to them in such a way that they grow to increasingly appreciate their family lineage and also gain a greater sense of their own destiny. I hope the past will catapult them into the future. My prayer is, that if I do it right, they will continue the tradition and pass the same along to my grandchildren someday.

Those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ also have a spiritual genealogy. It is every bit as important as our biological genealogy and in some ways may actually be more important to us. Both Scripture and Church history bear witness to the great gift we possess in our spiritual ancestry. If we handle it properly, it can be presented to our children in such a way that they grow to appreciate it more, gain a greater sense of their own destiny, and catapult into the future. If we handle our spiritual genealogy biblically, then there is a greater likelihood that our children will in turn pass this precious gift on to our grandchildren.

## Scripture's Voice for Multigenerational Faith

The pages of Scripture are filled with imagery that attests to the importance of passing the content and vibrancy of our faith in God on to succeeding generations. The collective picture provided by Scripture of our spiritual development is much broader than just a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. The Word of God speaks to us of God's work in the past. The Bible speaks to us of the here and now in which we live. And it speaks to us of that which is yet to come. This theme relates to our salvation and our living out that salvation beyond ourselves. From the Old Testament to the New Testament the theme of multigenerational faith connections is strewn throughout the Scriptures.

Of all the books of the Bible, the Psalms, perhaps, provide the most overwhelming testimony of the importance of cherishing and passing along our spiritual genealogy. The book of Psalms is filled with references to the necessity of spending ourselves in the process of instilling our faith in the generations to come. Of particular interest is Psalm 78.<sup>1</sup> The psalmist, through highlighting several insights, reveals the heart of God when it comes to instilling faith in future generations. He takes up the message of many other psalms by writing of the importance of telling coming generations about the person, work, and commandments of God.<sup>2</sup> He highlights the reason why it is

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<sup>1</sup> Marvin E. Tate, *Word Biblical Commentary, volume 20, Psalms 51-100*, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1990), 281. Tate believes that the general word "story" in this psalm rather than its usual translation "proverb" best translates the presence of the Hebrew word *לשון*. His rationale is that this "psalm is presented as a teaching psalm in the form of a story, told in poetry."

<sup>2</sup> See also Psalm 22:30-31, 45:17, 71:18, 79:13, 89:1, 90:1, 102:12, 18, 135:13, 145:4.

so important for this succession to take place: so that future generations, including those yet to be born, will set their hope in God and praise Him.

One commentator observes that this historical psalm admonishes fathers to pass on the history they have received so that their children “may not be, as their fathers, rebellious and unreliable.”<sup>3</sup> The retelling of their history is not meant to be sensationalized. It is to be an honest retelling of the “true condition of the nation, recalling the infidelity and failures of her history with Yahweh.”<sup>4</sup> Psalm 78 also underscores the importance of an unbroken chain that spans multiple generations. This was something the nation of Israel struggled to maintain throughout their history. The psalmist is careful to model a proper relationship with the past by looking back with respect and appreciation.<sup>5</sup> He takes into account generations who are currently walking the earth and reading the psalm, and he includes the generations who have already passed from the earth. He acknowledges that these generations have passed their faith to subsequent generations and generations yet to be born. He also presupposes that by the current generation continuing to carry out its call to pay forward its faith, the generations yet to come will reap the fruit of the faithfulness of all the preceding generations. In this way the chain is kept unbroken and the content of what is shared will include that which past generations shared.

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<sup>3</sup> Charles Augustus Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms, volume II, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments*, ed. Samuel Rolles Driver and Alfred Plummer (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 178.

<sup>4</sup> Tate, *Psalms 51- 100*, 287.

<sup>5</sup> Tate, *Psalms 51- 100*, 281 & 288. Verse two includes the Hebrew word רִמְיָה, which is translated “riddle.” It carries with it the idea of using common words to convey something through concealed meanings “known only to those who know how to solve the riddle.” In the case of this psalm, the solution “lies in telling the ‘story’ to those yet to come.” Without this understanding the coming generations will struggle to continue faithfully as the people of God. See also, John Goldingay, *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, Psalms, Volume 2: Psalms 42 – 89*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 484 – 485.

However, breaking the chain creates separation from the collective voice of those who have gone before. The psalmist seems to be seeking to insure that as each generation passes on its faith the transmission will take place in such a way that the generation receiving the teaching will recognize that what it is receiving is coming from a much deeper well than just the generation passing it on. In verses two through four of Psalm 78 the psalmist makes an appeal to the generation doing the teaching to not make it appear as though what it is conveying to younger generations is original. He wants the fledgling Christians to connect with the reality of how far back their legacy reaches, thereby creating a deeply rooted connection to the larger heritage of faith for this and future generations.

Multiple other psalms share many of these themes. Psalm 22, a psalm with Messianic overtones, concludes with a promise that people yet to be born will hear of the righteousness of God.<sup>6</sup> Psalm 45 closes with a reference to remembrance through all generations and Psalm 102 includes this as well.<sup>7</sup> This theme of having a mindset that

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<sup>6</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 19, Psalms 1 – 50*, ed. Bruce Metzger, et. al. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 201 – 202. The conclusion of this psalm is an admonition to look beyond the immediate and temporal nature of our own lives to the eternal purposes of God. One commentator observes “Survival is not so much important for its own sake as it is important for providing a further opportunity for participation in the worship of God, so that if one died, there was at least the possibility of descendants worshipping God.” Though death will come to all men the mighty acts of God be remembered and passed on “from individual to community in the present, and from present to future.” See also, Goldingay, *Psalms*, 339 – 340, and Charles Augustus Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Volume I, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments*, ed. Samuel Rolles Driver, Alfred Plummer, and Charles Augustus Briggs (Edinburgh, England: T & T Clark, 1986), 200 – 201.

<sup>7</sup> Craigie, *Psalms 1 – 50*, 341. Psalm 45 is a royal wedding psalm with a second meaning related to the relationship between Christ the Bridegroom and his bride, the church. In this context one commentator observes that the final verse “the ultimate blessing of the marriage is that of the children, the future generations through whom the kingdom would flourish.” John Goldingay, *Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms, Psalms, Volume 3: Psalms 90 – 150*, ed. Tremper Longman III, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 160 – 161. Psalm 102 is a psalm that laments current struggles but closes by acknowledging that Yahweh is eternal and in His presence is security and sustenance. The psalmist asks that, not he, but his children would find deliverance to that place in the presence of God once

considers future generations continues to echo throughout the Psalms. Psalm 79 concludes with a declaration that God's praise will be recounted forever from generation to generation.<sup>8</sup> This is the same declaration that begins Psalm 89.<sup>9</sup> Time and again in the Psalms it is seen as essential to the vitality of the people of God to declare the works of God to upcoming generations. It is understood that the elements of our faith, its content and its vitality are to be passed on so they outlive us.

The remaining books of the Old Testament echo the sentiments of the Psalms concerning the transmission of faith from generation to generation. The Hebrew phrase, “דור דור” or “דור דור” meaning “throughout your/their generations”<sup>10</sup> is found thirty-six times in the Pentateuch.<sup>11</sup> There are various other phrases throughout the Pentateuch that further reinforce the concept behind this one phrase.<sup>12</sup> The combined impact of these passages reveals God's desire early on in the history of His people Israel to instill in them the necessity of thinking beyond their own existence to the days when

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more. See also, Leslie C. Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary, volume 21, Psalms 101 – 150*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, et. al. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2002), 22 – 23, and Briggs, *Psalms, Volume II*, 362 – 363.

<sup>8</sup> Tate, *Psalms 51 – 100*, 301. This declaration of ongoing praise comes in the context of the community of Israel complaining to God and crying out for His deliverance. In a certain sense the declaration is a surprising conclusion to the psalm though it reveals their confidence in the God's promise of redemption.

<sup>9</sup> Tate, *Psalms 51 – 100*, 419. In all of these psalms, including Psalm 89, the theme being passed on from generation to generation is the “firmly fixed faithfulness of Yahweh and his deeds of loyal-love for his people.” In the midst of hardship, prosperity, rebellion, and faithfulness on the part of the people of God, this theme continues like a connecting thread from generation to generation.

<sup>10</sup> Especially of a future generation...v. further, of posterity, אַרְבֵּעַ דִּרְוֹת Job 42:16; usually pl. c. sf. F. Brown, S. R. Driver, & C. A. Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 17:7, 9, 12; Exodus 12:14, 17, 42; 16:32, 33; 27:21; 29:42; 30:8, 10, 21, 31; 31:13, 16; 40:15; Leviticus 3:17; 6:18; 7:36; 10:9; 17:7; 21:17; 22:3; 23: 14, 21, 31, 41; 24:3; Numbers 10:8; 15: 15, 21, 23, 38; 18:23; 35:29. See also Joshua 22:27, 28.

<sup>12</sup> Examples include: Exodus 3:15; Deuteronomy 4:9; 6:1-9.

their children's children will be walking the earth and representing Him to the nations. This mindset leaves no room for self-centeredness in pursuing a developing faith. It redefines successful Christian living as largely measured by results that are often not seen or fully realized in the current generation's lifetime.

Deuteronomy includes the Shema,<sup>13</sup> which is still the core Hebrew prayer in Judaism. The content of the Shema passage in Deuteronomy 6 emphasizes the non-optional nature of transmitting the commandments of God from generation to generation.<sup>14</sup> Duane Christensen has written of this passage, "Nothing is more important to the future of God's people than the communication of 'these words.'"<sup>15</sup> This communication includes reciting and hearing. "We need to listen to our neighbors because faith does not originate in uncorrupted hearts and wills of our own. ... It comes from outside, raised by the God who assigns it."<sup>16</sup> It is treasured within the hearts of the parents and passed to the hearts of their children, in turn to be cherished by them and then passed on.<sup>17</sup> It can only be effectively passed on if it is kept the central focus of the heart.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-9. Though this is the core of the Shema it includes two other parts which are learned and recited; Deuteronomy 11:13-21 and Numbers 15:37-41.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries*, ed. Patrick C. Miller (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 85. Brueggemann has observed, "Deuteronomy always has its eyes on the children, on the coming generation." Duane L. Christensen, *Word Biblical Commentary, volume 6, Deuteronomy 1:1 – 21:9, Second Edition*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, et. al. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 143. Christensen agrees, "The focus on teaching your children 'these words' diligently within the context of the family – at all conceivable times and places – illustrates once again the pedagogical purpose of Deuteronomy. The content of this book was the primary curriculum in an ongoing program of religious education in ancient Israel."

<sup>15</sup> Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1 – 21:9*, 142.

<sup>16</sup> Telford Work, *Deuteronomy, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible*, ed. R. R. Reno, et. al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 95.

<sup>17</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman,

The process presented includes far more than just rote memorization and recitation of words, rather it is presented in a way that makes it “the fabric of life and conversation.”<sup>19</sup> The practice also incorporates visual reminders scattered throughout the course of daily life, older generations living as examples of obedience to these commandments, and, perhaps most important of all, each generation maintaining a vitality and passion for the God who is behind all these commands.<sup>20</sup> All these elements combine in hopes that what is passed on is safeguarded against the potential for rote obedience and dead orthodoxy.<sup>21</sup>

Joshua 4 further affirms the importance God placed on His people having faith reminders beyond and, yet, complementary to His Word. The purpose of these reminders is to induce remembrance of the works of God among past generations in order to stoke the fires of faith in future generations. God gives the command to Joshua as he leads the people across the Jordan River to gather twelve stones from the center of the riverbed, one for each tribe. Joshua is then instructed to pile these stones in the midst of the Israelite’s camp. These rocks were to become stones of remembrance for every member

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1994), 167. The imagery of the passage has been described by one commentator as “that of the engraver of a monument who takes hammer and chisel in hand and with painstaking care etches a text into the face of a solid slab of granite. The sheer labor of such a task is daunting indeed, by once done the message is there to stay.”

<sup>18</sup> Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 85.

<sup>19</sup> J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy, Appollos Old Testament Commentary*, ed. David W. Baker and Gordon J. Wenham (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 142. See also, Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 167.

<sup>20</sup> Work, *Deuteronomy*, 97. “Forgetfulness is a chronic condition of mortal humanity. A generation easily comes to presume its wisdom or forget it....the practices of 6:7-9 help realize 6:6 in order to fulfill 6:4-5.”

<sup>21</sup> McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 142. These verses call for a unity of outward action and sign and inward heart condition and life focus in which “the law of God is one with piety and lifestyle.” See also, Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1 – 21:9*, 143.



of the nation, irrespective of age. They served as a visible and public sign. What provided remembrance for those who crossed the Jordan River was designed to spark curiosity in their children and grandchildren. When the children saw the pile of stones in the center of camp and asked questions like, ‘What do those stones mean to you?’ the people were to be faithful in sharing the account of God stopping the waters of the Jordan River at flood stage before the ark of the covenant of the Lord so the people could pass over on dry ground. In this way, “these stones shall be to the people of Israel a memorial forever.”<sup>22</sup> These verses illustrate historically the benefit of keeping tangible reminders before future generations. Such reminders serve to prompt questions that afford opportunities to spread the stories of God’s mighty work among our spiritual ancestors both from the pages of Scripture and the annals of church history.<sup>23</sup>

Further confirmation of God’s heart for generational links can be found through the prophet Jeremiah who portrays the people of Israel as travelers who have lost their way.<sup>24</sup> They stand at a crossroad and must make a clear decision concerning which path is the right path to choose. Even in our GPS-dependent culture we understand the importance of taking the right path. A wrong turn can mean anything from additional hours added to our trip to ending up at a completely different destination. Jeremiah’s listeners faced the choice between rest or turmoil for their souls. In context, this verse is speaking of God’s judgment that is coming upon the people of Israel because, rather than

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<sup>22</sup> Joshua 4:6-7.

<sup>23</sup> David M. Howard, Jr., *Joshua, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 139 – 143, Marten H. Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua, New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 93 – 97, Trent C. Butler, *Word Biblical Commentary, volume 7, Joshua*, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1983), 43 – 44, 50 -51.

<sup>24</sup> Jeremiah 6:16.

looking for a connection with the good way, the ancient paths of their ancestors, they rejected that path and strayed.<sup>25</sup> The people chose to go their own way, forge their own path, and ignore the wisdom and experience of those who had gone before.<sup>26</sup> The result was judgment and disaster. The unbroken connection that builds upon past generations was deliberately broken, and the cost was steep and disastrous.<sup>27</sup>

Now, as then, the price is steep. Robert Rayburn writes the following about the importance of our connection to the past. The “[church’s] life is sustained through roots that descend deep into the past.” He continues, “If anything is plain and unmistakable from the way in which godliness and faith are taught in Holy Scripture, it is that one moves forward in the life of God by looking backward.”<sup>28</sup>

The results of Israel’s rejection of connections to their faith heritage are made more clear in Jeremiah chapter twenty-nine, which revisits the premise of Jeremiah 6:16 from a slightly different perspective. The people of Israel find themselves in exile as a result of their rebellion against God. While in exile God calls His people to live as

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<sup>25</sup> J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 260 – 261. Jeremiah appeals to Israel to “study the traditions of the nation to discover what conduct was pleasing to Yahweh.” Jeremiah was not a prophet who brought new revelation to the nation of Israel. He was tasked with reminding the wayward nation of what they had forgotten. He, like many of the prophets who preceded him was, “deeply attached to ancient traditions which ran back to the covenant established between Yahweh and Israel at Sinai.” See also, Peter C. Craigie, Page H. Kelley, and Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., *Word Biblical Commentary, volume 26, Jeremiah 1 – 25*, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1991), 105 – 107.

<sup>26</sup> F. B. Huey, Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations, The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 99. Huey, Jr.’s observation of this verse is helpful, “These words should not be taken as a polemic against progress or stubborn intransigence against change but rather as a commitment to submit to God’s ways.”

<sup>27</sup> The high price of disconnecting from our faith heritage can also be seen in the following Old Testament passages: Exodus 20:5; 34:7; Numbers 14:18; Deuteronomy 5:9; 6:2ff; Judges 2:10; Joel 1:3.

<sup>28</sup> Robert S. Rayburn, “Biblical and Pastoral Basis for Creeds and Confessions.” *Premise* vol. III, number 3, March 29, 1996, <http://www.reformedreader.org/bpcc.htm> (accessed September 30, 2010).

contributing citizens in the foreign cities in which they are located. Jeremiah tells the people to settle in for a long stay in exile rather than listen to the messages delivered by the false prophets who were saying that the stay in Babylon would be short.<sup>29</sup> They are to adopt a mindset of praying for and pursuing the blessing of the city.<sup>30</sup> Through the prophet Jeremiah, God reminds the people that He has not forgotten His promise to them, assuring them that it will be fulfilled, just not as they likely had expected or hoped. That is, instead of being fulfilled in their generation, the promise of return from exile will find fulfillment for generations yet to be born.

Essentially, God calls His people to find hope in and live for the fulfillment of a promise that they will never directly enjoy. They are to be the generation that re-establishes the faith heritage connection for future generations, trusting God will faithfully complete in these generations yet to be born what He has begun in them.<sup>31</sup> This multi-generational promise reinforces God's desire that we His people would capture a vision of our lives that goes far beyond the here and now of our own lifetime, to the reality of multigenerational legacy rooted in the faith heritage of those who have gone before us.<sup>32</sup> God's vision for us stretches from the present deeply in both directions, past and future.

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<sup>29</sup> Gerald L. Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Word Biblical Commentary*, volume 27, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and John D. W. Watts (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1995), 72, see also, Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 546.

<sup>30</sup> P. Volz, *Der Prophet Jeremia*, KAT 10 (Leipzig: Dierchert, 1928), 269, cited in Huey, Jr., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 253. According to Volz, this is the only place in the Old Testament that prayer for one's enemies is commended.

<sup>31</sup> Keown, *Jeremiah 26 – 52*, 73.

<sup>32</sup> Voddie Baucham, "Multigenerational Promise," Legacy 1, MP3 file, <http://biblepreaching.tv/videos/9/legacy-multi-generational-promise-voddie-baucham> (accessed January 6, 2011).

The topic of looking at our faith as a multigenerational investment carries into the New Testament through the teachings of Jesus in the book of Matthew. In the thirteenth chapter, Jesus teaches his disciples, through seven parables, about the value of the gospel and the treasure it is to those who find it. Jesus uses the Old Testament in these parables, providing another layer of emphasis to the principle he is conveying to his disciples.<sup>33</sup> In the last of these parables Jesus begins by asking his disciples if they have understood what He has been teaching. They respond affirmatively; though they do not fully understand the implications of everything Jesus has taught, they are genuinely dialed in and their hearts are with Him.

Jesus takes their answer and in the verses that follow, he calls them to apply it. In verse fifty-two Jesus challenges His followers to see the value of new and old in their gospel treasure.<sup>34</sup> His point is that the gospel is a treasure that is rooted in old, timeless, unchanging principles that require new, fresh, timely applications. The old principles and the old root will have continually new applications and new fruit. There cannot be one without the other. This means that each generation must be rooted in the old principles of the gospel by having them passed down from generation to generation, and the people of

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<sup>33</sup> G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, ed., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 48 – 50.

<sup>34</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew, The New International Commentary of the New Testament*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 544 – 547. France writes, “those secrets themselves are not really ‘new’; they are ‘things hidden since the foundation of the world’ (v.35), and it is only their revelation which is new. If Jesus’ disciples have indeed ‘understood’ these old/new truths (v.51), they are now in a position to offer more adequate provision for God’s household, and this parable challenges them to ‘bring it out’ for the benefit of others.” (546). See also, David L. Turner, *Matthew, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 354 – 355.

each generation also must have the freedom to freshly apply the gospel to their lives and situations.<sup>35</sup>

Ephesians 6 provides a perspective rooted in the Ten Commandments. The Apostle Paul challenges children to honor their parents, adding that it is the first commandment with a promise attached to it.<sup>36</sup> The promise is twofold and connects the command with the idea of living with one arm stretched into the past and one stretched into the future seeking to be a link in the chain of multigenerational legacy. The first part of the promise appears to be personal but is really rooted in connecting to the past. Paul writes that honoring our parents is a good idea so that life will go well for us. The implications of this are broader than just the safeguard provided by staying connected to our faith heritage; however, this is one benefit. Handling our heritage with respect and seeing the relevance of doing so begins with honoring the parents who are our closest link to that heritage. If we make it a practice of honoring the heritage we have right in front of us, we are more likely to honor the heritage that reaches all the way back into the Old Testament. By doing so, we afford ourselves an unshakable foundation upon which to live out our days.<sup>37</sup>

The second part of the promise reaches beyond our lifetime, promising that we will live long in the land. This aspect of the promise is built on a promise God gave to His people several times in the Old Testament: we reap what we sow.<sup>38</sup> On a practical

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<sup>35</sup> See also Matthew 9:14-17.

<sup>36</sup> Ephesians 6:1-2.

<sup>37</sup> Frank Thielman, *Ephesians, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 395 – 403.

<sup>38</sup> The Old Testament promises that future generations to the third and fourth generation reap the consequences of our unfaithfulness or our faithfulness. Old Testament examples of God honoring

level if we honor our heritage, then we are leaving a positive example for our children to follow. They are more likely to honor their larger heritage and us if they see this kind of honor modeled in us. We have the opportunity to leave a legacy of connectedness for our children to follow or a legacy of isolation that grows increasingly lonelier with each generation.<sup>39</sup>

The examples provided so far have had primary application within the nucleus of the natural family, immediate and extended. The Pastoral Epistles<sup>40</sup> written by the Apostle Paul provides us with an example that has its primary application within the nucleus of the spiritual family, the church. The insights into the priorities that should consume us when it comes to the workings of local expressions of the body of Christ are invaluable. Paul provides a peek at his conviction in 2 Timothy 2:2,<sup>41</sup> but in his letter to Titus he includes an entire passage that meticulously describes how faith is to be transferred from one generation to the next. What is presented in Titus 2:1-10 is meant to be viewed in the larger context of the local church, our spiritual family.<sup>42</sup> In this context, the older men<sup>43</sup> are addressed first and admonished to be “dignified.” The community of

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faithfulness for several generations can be seen in the following places: 2 Kings 10:30, 15:12, Job 42:15-17. The positive promise is implied in the following passages: Exodus 20:5-6, Deuteronomy 5:9-10.

<sup>39</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1984), 397 – 398.

<sup>40</sup> The Pastoral Epistles consist of 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus.

<sup>41</sup> William D. Mounce, *Word Biblical Commentary, volume 46, Pastoral Epistles*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, et. al. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 505. Paul is not speaking of apostolic succession with his request in this verse. Instead, Mounce observes that his words are rooted in the desire to see Timothy one more time. It is a personal comment to a friend.

<sup>42</sup> Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 406.

<sup>43</sup> This could also be understood as “men mature in years.”

believers is to consider these men worthy of respect, a state that most naturally takes place as these men invest their lives in the lives of others, thereby passing their faith on to the next generation. Paul continues by addressing the older women and specifically challenges them to invest in the younger women. The training these older women engage in is to be intentional. The investment is for the purpose of preventing disgrace from coming to the Word of God. The teaching of older women and men consists of living lives characterized by the influence of the gospel as much as the verbal transference of propositional truth. In both cases, the older are rooting the younger in the unchanging principles of living in the light of the gospel.<sup>44</sup>

After addressing older men and women Paul redirects his attention to the young men and young women. Paul's emphasis with the younger is lives characterized by godliness, essentially emulating what has been modeled for them. The only difference is each generation is doing it relative to the present age in which it lives.<sup>45</sup> One theme that runs through the entire passage is that each individual should be invested in by the older generations while at the same time investing in the younger generations - living in such a way as to spend and be spent in the process of investment.<sup>46</sup>

In a culture in which there are multitudes of young men and women who have lacked the blessing of being "parented" during their younger years, the kind of ministry Paul describes here in Titus is crucial to the long term health and multiplication of God's

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<sup>44</sup> Titus 2:1.

<sup>45</sup> Titus 2:12.

<sup>46</sup> Philip H. Towner, *The Letter to Timothy and Titus, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed., Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 714. See also, Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 407 – 408.

kingdom in our present age.<sup>47</sup> One third of Paul's letter to Titus focuses on conveying the importance of creating a church culture that values multigenerational legacy from the oldest to the youngest.<sup>48</sup> Given all the things Paul could have chosen to emphasize further, this choice amplifies the significance he places upon embracing and imparting this conviction within our own local church context. It may take a generation or several to see the fruits of such an endeavor, as was the case in Jeremiah, but in the end it is worth it.<sup>49</sup>

The psalmist in Psalm 71 perhaps best sums up the attitude that resonates throughout the Scriptures concerning the essential nature of passing on the content and vibrancy of our faith. He made God's passion his own writing: "So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come."<sup>50</sup> One can only speculate on the passion, emotion, and exhilaration that poured from the psalmist's heart as he penned these words.<sup>51</sup> Here was a man who had captured the essence of God's command to live in such a way that his faith

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<sup>47</sup> Randy Stinson and Timothy Paul Jones, eds. *Trained in the Fear of God: Family Ministry in Theological, Historical, and Practical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011), 27. Michael Anthony and Michelle Anthony, *A Theology for Family Ministries* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2011), 176 – 177.

<sup>48</sup> This statement and much of the philosophy underlying this treatment of Paul's words in Titus and 2 Timothy are grounded in an understanding of Paul's use of the metaphor of family within his New Testament letters. Paul saw the church as a family in which we are sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters in Christ. Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001). Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2009). Trevor Burke, *Adopted into God's Family: Exploring a Pauline Metaphor*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006).

<sup>49</sup> Andrew Hedges, "Generations of Faith," MorningStar Baptist Church, Sunday, October 10, 2010, MP3 file, <http://www.morningstardayton.org/resources/audio/2010/10/11/generations-faith> (accessed November 12, 2010).

<sup>50</sup> Psalm 71:18.

<sup>51</sup> Tate, *Psalms 51 – 100*, 216. Tate writes of this verse, "The speaker wants the strength to make the coming generation know that no god can compare with Yahweh."



becomes the foundation upon which future generations of believers, will build their own faith upon. The words and attitude of the psalmist should be the hymn of every professing believer today. It is difficult to miss the implications from Scripture that perhaps the greatest means of evangelism and church growth we possess is rooted in passing our vibrantly orthodox faith from generation to generation.

### **History's Voice for Multigenerational Faith**

Scripture's testimony to the importance of multigenerational faith has been adopted and expressed by the church throughout its history. We possess nearly two thousand years of evidence to this reality. The Church of Jesus Christ celebrates an unbroken connection that extends all the way back to its beginnings. Each generation has faithfully passed on the gospel to the succeeding generation. There have been seasons when what was passed on could largely be described as dead orthodoxy, but even in those times there has always been a remnant who held fast to vibrant biblical faith. We who presently are the Church of Jesus Christ on earth exist largely because of these faithful brothers and sisters who have gone before us. We rejoice in those who have taken seriously their call to live as disciples of Jesus Christ and who see their lives as an investment in others.

There is immense value in properly handling our history, for us and for future generations. Yet, we need not compromise our high view of Scripture in order to make the most of our heritage as there is a complementary richness found in the collective voice of the church. Acts 15 provides us with an example of the church coming together to discuss a matter in which the understanding of Scripture was unclear. There were

diverse interpretations regarding the understanding of what was required for salvation. Some were arguing that circumcision was a *must* to be saved and others were posturing that salvation was not dependent upon literal circumcision. A great deal of the diversity of interpretation sprung from the unique situation of the church at the time. The first generation of Christians was primarily Jewish people who were well established in the Mosaic Law and the teachings of the Old Testament. However, as the church grew into the second generation and expanded its borders as Jesus had commanded in Matthew 28 and Acts 1, many non-Jews, also called Gentiles, were being converted.<sup>52</sup> They did not possess the foundation of the Mosaic Law because they had not been raised in and around the traditions of the Jewish people, including circumcision.

The Apostles were divided on their understanding of the issue, so, in order to resolve the question, a council was called in the city of Jerusalem. Leadership of church bodies gathered, listened to testimony of the work of God, debated, spoke of God's call of salvation, considered the message of Scripture, and made a decision that circumcision was not necessary for salvation. The leaders then wrote a letter for the Gentile churches and sent it out to be read. The result was the church unified in their understanding of how to proceed on an issue that threatened to bring division. They shared that understanding with the churches across the Roman Empire. The local churches, working together prayerfully, came to a decision and crafted a man-made document that provided a concise understanding of the meaning of Scripture related to their unique crisis.

History reveals that the church has often followed this pattern. The presence of councils and creeds reveals the church's efforts to follow the pattern modeled in Acts 15.

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<sup>52</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts, Revised, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988) 286.

Practical and theological disputes have not always ended this way. At times they have legitimately caused separation and division that was necessary to preserve orthodoxy. However, the evidence from local churches, associations, and denominations of confessions of faith and catechisms reveals the ongoing process of bodies of believers working together prayerfully to craft documents that provide concise understandings of the meaning of Scripture related to their cultural climate.<sup>53</sup>

Acts 15 provides us with a relevant illustration from the pages of Scripture as to the importance of the church's voice. This collective voice is valuable, though not supremely authoritative. Individual believers may be blessed with godly wisdom and powerful insight but the combined work of the body of Christ expressed in its creeds exceeds any product of individuals working alone. We evaluate these works of the Church with the Bible as our guide. We approach the process with humility, acknowledging that we cannot gain the level of maturity and understanding of God and His character He desires for us without some measure of dependence on the labors of the Church that produced the creeds.<sup>54</sup>

Baptists have been particularly sensitive in attributing authority to any religious document, organization, or individual other than the Bible. Their skepticism is rooted in having experienced the abuse of man-made traditions being allied with civil authorities and elevating these traditions over and above the authority of Scripture. The outcome of both inevitably led to persecution or forced uniformity. Persecution has been such a part of the Baptist patchwork that Timothy and Denise George have written of it, "The Baptist

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<sup>53</sup> Though controversy and dispute have regularly been a part of the development of these materials they regularly reveal the collective work of local churches seeking Scriptural integrity.

<sup>54</sup> Rayburn, "Biblical and Pastoral Basis for Creeds and Confessions."

movement...began as a small persecuted sect in pre-Revolutionary England. One critic labeled them as ‘miscreants begat in rebellion, born in sedition, and nursed in faction.’”<sup>55</sup>

The Baptist history of adversity and persecution clarifies why Baptists have attempted to walk such a fine line when it comes to utilizing the history of the church—even their own church’s history. Though historically Baptists found themselves on the wrong side of establishmentarianism,<sup>56</sup> abuses do not have to result in us going to the extreme other end of the spectrum. There were many other types of abuses in church history, not just the abuse of confessions. English and American Baptists each felt the sting of persecution at the hands of those who sought to stifle religious freedom through the enforcement of adherence to particular historic creeds and/or confessions.<sup>57</sup> And yet, both groups, when seeking to articulate their faith in the midst of their times through confessions of faith, worked on the shoulders of others and often readily acknowledged

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<sup>55</sup> Timothy and Denise George, General Editors’ Introduction, found in *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), v.

<sup>56</sup> 1. Denoting or relating to an Established Church, esp. the Church of England. 2. Denoting or relating to the principle of a Church being officially recognized as a national institution. Establishmentarianism. *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/establishmentarianism> (accessed December 21, 2010).

<sup>57</sup> Isaac Backus’s historical works are a good source to read more about the persecutions faced by Baptists. They include; Isaac Backus, *Your Baptist Heritage “1620-1804,”* revised ed. (Little Rock, AR: The Challenge Press, 1976), Original title: *Church History of New England from “1620-1804,”* also, Isaac Backus, *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists, Volume I*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. repr. (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Newton, MA: Backus Historical Society, 1871), Isaac Backus, *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists, Volume II* (Paris, AK: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2001). For additional reading about persecutions the Anabaptists faced see; Thieleman J. van Braght and I. Daniel Rupp, *The Bloody Theatre, or Martyrs’ Mirror, of the Defenceless Christians: Who Suffered and Were Put to Death for the Testimony of Jesus, Their Savior, from the Time of Christ Until the Year A.D. 1660* (Near Lampeter Square, Lancaster Co., PA: David Miller, 1837), Leonard Verduin, *The Reformers and Their Stepchildren* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964).

they did so.<sup>58</sup> Their story is testimony to the fact that, even amidst the abuses stemming from establishmentarianism, our spiritual ancestors sought to maintain their connection to the past with integrity and Scriptural acumen.

Baptist's concern surrounding the use of historic confessions is greatly rooted in the union of church and state. Such documents were exalted and used for the purpose of persecution in this union. In reality the confessions were abused because they were used for purposes other than that for which they were drafted. The union of church and state led to many other abuses as well, including "the abuse of Scripture, the abuse of law, the abuse of the state, the abuse of the church, and the abuse of the penal system all result from establishmentarianism."<sup>59</sup> In most of these instances we have not called for the elimination of the thing abused, but this has been the case for confessions and other historic documents of our faith. Indeed, we may experience greater benefit by seeking purification and renewal of these historic documents as has been the approach with most of the other things abused in the church-state union.<sup>60</sup>

When we take the time to observe the context in which confessions were written, what rises to the surface time and again is the fact that those who wrote these confessions had "no desire to produce something which would again hide the Word of God from the

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<sup>58</sup> The study of Baptist Confessions of faith that follows will show the links connecting many of them to one another and other religious documents as well such as the creeds of the early church and the Westminster Confession.

<sup>59</sup> Tom Nettles, "Are Creeds Appropriate for Bible Believing Baptists?" *Founder's Journal*, issue 3, fall/winter 1990-91, under "Objections Generally Considered." [http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/journal/fj03/article2\\_fr.html](http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/journal/fj03/article2_fr.html) (accessed October 11, 2009).

<sup>60</sup> Nettles, "Creeds?" under "Objections Generally Considered."

eyes of the people.”<sup>61</sup> They were often seeking to illuminate Scripture in their present age. They wanted to take the old principles of the gospel and make timely applications.

One such example comes from *The French Confession of 1559* or *La confession de foi des églises réformées de France dite confession de foi de la Rochelle (1559)*.<sup>62</sup>

Those who compiled this confession carefully chose their terminology to represent their desire to uphold the authority of Scripture and recognize the limits of Scripture. In the prefatory letter to the king of France, the writers were appealing to the king because of persecution they were experiencing for their faith. The confession was given to the king to dispel misinformation and appeal to the king to stop the oppression. In this context the compilers boldly proclaimed their reverence for the authority of Scripture:

For the articles of our **faith**, which are all declared at some length in our **Confession**, all come to this: that since God has sufficiently declared his will to us through his Prophets and Apostles, and even by the mouth of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, we owe such respect and reverence to the Word of God as shall prevent us from adding to it any thing of our own, but shall make us conform entirely to the rules it prescribes.<sup>63</sup>

Within the Confession itself the writers also acknowledge the limits of Scripture and the importance of the work of the early church in articulating and preserving orthodoxy concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. “And in this we confess that which has been established by the ancient councils, and we detest all sects and heresies...”<sup>64</sup> Here is an

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<sup>61</sup> Nettles, “Creeds?” under “Contra Sola Scriptura.”

<sup>62</sup> Full text available in English at, <http://www.creeds.net/reformed/frconf.htm> (accessed, November 21, 2010).

<sup>63</sup> Text is transcribed from Philip Schaff's *The Creeds of Christendom, with a history and critical notes*; 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, n.d. repr. from the 1931 edition by arrangement with Harper and Row. pp. 356-382. <http://www.creeds.net/reformed/frconf.htm> (accessed November 27, 2010).

<sup>64</sup> Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, under “Article VI.”

example of the beautiful union and valuable offspring resulting when believers possess a proper appreciation for Scripture and an unbroken connection to our forefathers. This is merely one example from the age of the Reformation, a time which alone “produced a mountain of confessions; it also inculcated a deep, pure, and passionate commitment to the sole authority of Scripture.”<sup>65</sup>

From their earliest days,<sup>66</sup> Baptists saw the importance of standing on the sole authority of Scripture and the need to produce a multitude of confessions of faith. Their confessions of faith make clear their high view of Scripture through the usage of Scripture passages to support their statements and their statements made concerning the Scriptures.<sup>67</sup> The confessions of faith of early Baptists also reveal a desire to remain connected with the redemptive elements of their faith heritage. They were careful to ensure that their confessions “did not acquire permanent official status, and were never permitted to become authoritative creeds.”<sup>68</sup> Even so, these documents reveal the interest among Baptists to articulate their doctrinal beliefs in their present age even if it was with a local scope rather than as a central confessional canon. That status was reserved for the

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<sup>65</sup> Nettles, “Creeds?” under “Contra Sola Scriptura.” Also see, H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1987), 69. It is interesting to note that McBeth writes, “If these references are often out of context, and many do not apply to the subjects addressed, nevertheless they show Baptist loyalty to the Bible.”

<sup>66</sup> The author considers the earliest days of Baptists to be seen in English Separatism during the seventeenth century, with influence from the earlier Anabaptist movement of the sixteenth century. For a more detailed account see, H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1987), 21-27. Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2003), 10-15. Stanley J. Grenz, *The Baptist Congregation* (Vancouver, BC: Regent, 2002), 75-79.

<sup>67</sup> James Leo Garrett, Jr., “Biblical Authority According to Baptist Confessions of Faith,” *Review & Expositor* 76, no. 1 (December 1, 1979): 43-54. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 14, 2010).

<sup>68</sup> William L. Lumpkin, “The Nature and Authority of Baptist Confessions of Faith,” *Review & Expositor* 76.1 (1979): 17-28, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*. EBSCO (accessed, December 31, 2010).

Word of God. They may have never imagined that the impact of their work concerning their stand on Scriptural doctrines would still be felt centuries later, but their faithfulness continues to be a foundation upon which we build.

An evaluation of the creeds and confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries requires an understanding that they grew out of a desire to complement not replace the early creeds of Christendom. The desire of the Reformers was to respond to the reality that evangelical theology had not been taught consistently for centuries within the church. The vital connection with the church's faith heritage had been severed. These Reformers built upon the early creeds and confessions of the church while at the same time speaking directly to the specific theological issues that were arising during their times. The earlier documents of the Christian church did not speak to the issues of their time specifically, so they needed to take the foundation received from earlier generations, apply it to their specific context, then communicate it within their cultural framework. By addressing the theological issues of their day, the Reformers were also able to explain where they stood concerning practices within the Roman Catholic Church. These explanations resulted in clarifying the unique stance of various groups that sprung up during the time of the Reformation.

In so doing, the Reformers declared and explained their beliefs in ways that were clear and easy to pass on to others.<sup>69</sup> This model, consistent with the testimony of the Word of God, is one the contemporary church would be wise to recapture. We must write confessions of faith for use in ways that promote effervescent biblical faith in those connected with them. As witnessed in Joshua chapter four, we must find ways to spark

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<sup>69</sup> Lumpkin, "The Nature and Authority of Baptist Confessions of Faith." 17-18.



curiosity leading to questions from our children. Their questions and our answers have the potential to connect their lives and faith to that of the previous generation's faith, including the ways in which God worked mightily in their midst. The more visual, continual, and memorable we can make our reminders and answers the more potential impact we stand to gain.

Understanding the ways in which Baptists have historically utilized their confessions of faith is significant to our moving forward by stepping back in history. Confessions of faith have been used as instruments of association and unity and also to educate and defend. However, not all confessions have been put forth for all of these purposes. It is interesting to note that during the seventeenth century confessions of faith were so popular in Great Britain and Europe that few groups did not have some sort of confession of faith. Confessions served the purpose of distinguishing groups and providing an apologetic for members and outsiders. "There was little fear of the confessions' dominating the groups owning them and even less of their usurping the place of the Scriptures."<sup>70</sup> This was equally true for Baptists of the time and carried over into the Puritan age. The only thing that prevented Baptists from utilizing confessions during this time was when they were unable to come to consensus theologically. During the seventeenth century, British Baptists were inseparably connected to the Puritan Revolution that was taking place in England. Baptist confessions and statements that came out of this period disclose the connection to British Puritanism. It is generally agreed upon by Baptist historians that "Baptists were a legitimate part of British

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<sup>70</sup> Lumpkin, "The Nature and Authority of Baptist Confessions of Faith." 24.

Puritanism.”<sup>71</sup> The Puritan Revolution that was taking place in England provides a backdrop for the earliest confessional statements from Baptists during the seventeenth century.

Puritans strongly held to the belief that the Bible was the only rule for faith and practice. For them it is observed, “The Bible was a new and thrilling discovery,”<sup>72</sup> having spent centuries without the Bible in the widespread familiar language accessible to the average person. This was a momentous time in which the Bible was being translated into common speech and saw the production of the Geneva Bible and the King James Version.<sup>73</sup> For Puritans, the Geneva Bible and, later, the Authorized Version provided them with the Bible to use as individuals and families in the home. As they studied it, they saw that the church and the Christian life that was conveyed to them was not what the Bible taught. This inspired them all the more to “go back to the Bible as the fountainhead of Christian teaching.”<sup>74</sup> The study of Scripture enlightened the disconnect that had taken place through the centuries. Puritans worked toward the re-establishment of that connection. Their efforts began to clarify their understanding of the Bible in the form of confessions and to pass on the content of these confessions they produced and utilized catechisms.

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<sup>71</sup> William L. Lumpkin, “The Bible in Early Baptist Confessions of Faith,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 19.3 (1984): 33-41, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*. EBSCO (accessed, December 31, 2010).

<sup>72</sup> Lumpkin, “The Bible in Early Baptist Confessions of Faith.” 33.

<sup>73</sup> Two works that provide an overview of the story of the King James Bible are, Alister E. McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How it Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), and Leland Ryken, *The Legacy of the King James Bible: Celebrating 400 Years of the Most Influential English Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011).

<sup>74</sup> Lumpkin, “The Bible in Early Baptist Confessions of Faith.” 34.

What becomes evident in surveying the earliest confessions of faith of the Baptists is that there was no desire to allow or force the statements of men, i.e., confessions, to supplant their fresh new discovery of the Scriptures. Rather, their confessions were brief explanations of the Baptist understanding of Scripture. “The Bible was for them supremely the book of religion, to be rationally received for their illumination and guidance.” Lumpkin later adds, “The Baptist confessors handled the Scriptures reverently, rationally, and with considerable skill.”<sup>75</sup>

Early confessions written by Baptists uncover a respect for history as well in that they were largely dependent upon early written ecclesial documents. These documents included confessions of faith from earlier Baptists, other denominations, creeds of the early church, and catechisms from other branches of Christianity. The *Schleitheim Confession* (1527)<sup>76</sup> was one of the earliest documents upon which they relied. It can be found at the root of many of the confessions of English Separatism. There was also dependence on the *Waterland Confession* (1580).<sup>77</sup> English Separatist leader John Smyth had the *Waterland Confession* republished in 1610, and his followers used it to form the first General Baptist church. Later, it served as a model in the Netherlands and England for a multitude of General Baptist church confessions.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, the *London*

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<sup>75</sup> Lumpkin, “The Bible in Early Baptist Confessions of Faith,” 41.

<sup>76</sup> William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 146. Full text of the *Schleitheim Confession*, 1527, 22 - 30. Full text online at, <http://www.anabaptistnetwork.com/schleitheimconfession> (accessed October 4, 2011).

<sup>77</sup> Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, full text of the *Waterland Confession*, 1580, 42 – 60.

<sup>78</sup> Lumpkin, “The Nature and Authority of Baptist Confessions,” 18-19.

*Confession, 1644* of the Particular Baptists took much of its language directly from the earlier Separate Baptist statement, *A True Confession, 1596*.<sup>79</sup>

There are two important confessions that arose during the seventeenth century. For the General Baptists the *Orthodox Creed* of 1679 was the most complete of their confessions. For the Particular Baptists, the *Second London Confession* of 1677 (with revisions in 1689) was the most famous. Each of these confessions was not drafted primarily to show the distinctives of the Baptist faith. Instead, they were written in London during a time when there was a great deal of political and religious unrest in the country. The turmoil created an unstable environment for Baptists and other dissenters who were in danger of falling under the accusation of heresy. At the time Baptists were concerned with the need to show unity and agreement with other Protestant groups around them. In the transcriber's preface of the *Orthodox Creed*, W. Madison Grace II writes, "Unity was one of the main purposes of *An Orthodox Creed*."<sup>80</sup> Westminster Calvinism was accepted in each of these confessions with some modifications. The *Westminster* and the *Savoy* confessions served as source documents for showing Baptist unity with the larger Protestant church during the middle and late seventeenth century.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 146. Full text of the *London Confession, 1644*, 153-171. Full text of *A True Confession, 1596*, 82-97.

<sup>80</sup> W. Madison Grace II, "Transcriber's Preface to *An Orthodox Creed: An Unabridged Seventeenth Century General Baptist Confession*." In *Southwestern Journal of Theology*. Volume 48, no.2, spring 2006. <http://www.baptisttheology.org/documents/PrefaceOrthodoxCreed.pdf> (accessed October 30, 2009). William H. Brackney calls the *Orthodox Creed* "The capstone document of the mediating confessions." William H. Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), 22.

<sup>81</sup> Samuel E. Waldron believes that *The Second London Confession* was based more fully on a revision to the *Westminster Confession* known as *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order, 1658*. He writes, "Only fourteen out of the 160 paragraphs contained in the 1689 Confession are not derived from the Savoy. More importantly, the structure is that of the Savoy and the thirty-two chapter titles are consecutively and precisely those of the Savoy." Samuel E. Waldron, *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, a Modern Exposition* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2005), 429. Since this was a "modest revision" in his

Each Baptist confession does deviate from the *Westminster* and *Savoy* confessions in various places, but, overall, there is agreement.<sup>82</sup>

In his church ministry Isaac Backus instilled biblical theology in those he led by utilizing confessions of faith and catechisms. At the churches he pastored in Titicut and Middleborough, Massachusetts, he drafted confessions of faith and church covenants. In these documents one can discern Backus's agreement with and dependence upon earlier church works and similar works of the time. The doctrine he delineates is consistent with that of the creeds of the Early Church. His Puritan roots from childhood are also quite evident. It is likely that Backus used multiple resources in composing these confessions of faith rather than just one document as a model. His confessions possess similarity with *The Waterland Confession* (1580) and like many of the Baptists and Protestants of his day Isaac Backus liberally used *The Westminster Confession* for the training of his congregation. These documents and Backus's use of them reveals his effort to maintain a

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view, the author believes it is still valid to reference the *Westminster Confession of Faith* as a primary source for *The Second London Confession*.

<sup>82</sup> *The Second London Confession of Faith*, though using the *Westminster Confession*, also used, probably more completely, a modest revision known as *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order*. Six Congregational Puritans including Thomas Goodwin and John Owen prepared this revision of the Westminster Confession. In thirty additional paragraphs the *Savoy* affirms the independence of local congregations and rejects Presbyterian Church government. It insists on religious freedom instead of a state church, but it remained true to the concept of infant baptism. *The Second London Confession* follows these rejections and also rejects paedobaptism, see article 29. Samuel E. Waldron, *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith: a Modern Exposition* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2005). *The Orthodox Creed* with its Arminian theology was rather liberal with their deviations from the *Westminster Confession*. In seeking to legitimate their beliefs they used language from *The Thirty-Nine Articles* to at the same time critique the established church. They took opportunity from the beginning of the confession to reveal their disagreement. In their first statement they reveal their feelings that the Anglican position expressed at the beginning of *The Thirty-Nine Articles* is an affront against the sovereignty of God. *The Orthodox Creed* also deviates concerning the church in statement thirty by taking a much more extreme position than the twentieth article of the Anglicans. Philip E. Thompson, "Seventeenth-Century Baptist Confessions in Context." *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 29, no. 4 (December 1, 2002): 335-348. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 17, 2010).

high esteem for Scripture while also properly handling all the resources at his disposal to pastor and disciple the flock entrusted to his care by God.

It may seem insignificant to quibble over such semantic issues like creed versus confession for Baptists in the twenty-first century, but it was a critical distinction for seventeenth-century Baptists. Creeds were understood during the seventeenth century as prescriptive; therefore could not be doctored or further developed. Confessions affirmed what a group believed at a particular time and in a particular place. Confessions allowed for the development of doctrine and revisions from generation to generation as long as it did not violate the testimony of Scripture.<sup>83</sup> The authority of Scripture was thereby safeguarded and the value of the doctrinal wrestling of our ancestors preserved. As a confessional people, Baptists during the seventeenth century took full advantage of writing and using confessions of faith. Indeed, it has been observed that “perhaps nothing did more to shape and share the Baptist faith in the seventeenth century than Baptists’ many confessions of faith.”<sup>84</sup>

By using the *Westminster Confession of Faith* as their starting point, the General and Particular Baptist groups were wisely using a document that had not only been drafted by groups who had gained acceptance under the current tumultuous religious and political climate, they were also utilizing the document that had been ratified by the church and the state.<sup>85</sup> The drafters’ sense of liberty to deviate from the *Westminster Confession* where they felt necessary reveals their desire to ultimately remain true to the

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<sup>83</sup> This is subject to rigorous debate.

<sup>84</sup> H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1987), 66.

<sup>85</sup> The *Westminster Confession of Faith* was published in 1646. Puritan theologians at the Westminster Assembly prepared it.

Scriptures and their own understanding of individual interpretation. The beauty of this is the way in which these values were championed together.

It also should be noted that the *Westminster Confession* was not an entirely original document. It, like the majority of documents crafted by the church through the centuries, was built upon a foundation. The *Westminster Confession* was an expansion of *The Irish Articles of 1615*.<sup>86</sup> The lesson for us is twofold. First, we can note the great measure of dependency on the Word of God and the history of the Church surfacing as these documents developed. Second, there is a long line of tradition upon which our faith is built.<sup>87</sup>

There was a desire among the drafters of the *Orthodox Creed* to reconnect beyond unity with the Protestant church around them back through generations of church history. The long line of dependence on the works of the Church can be traced all the way back to the Early Church. Motivated by this they included with the *Orthodox Creed* the *Apostles' Creed*, the *Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed*, and the *Athanasian Creed* with the *Orthodox Creed*. They did so in an effort to profess their unity with the heritage of ancient Christianity, showing their connection with "the truly Ancient and Apostolic Faith, that was once delivered unto the Saints, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and miraculously

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<sup>86</sup> A. F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly Its History and Standards Being the Baird Lecture for 1882* (Edinburgh: Nisbet & Co., 1883) 372-76; Philip Schaff, ed. *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, rev. D. S. Schaff, 6th ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1931) 1.760-65.

<sup>87</sup> R. Dean Anderson, Jr. "Of the Church: An Historical Overview of the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 25." *Westminster Theological Journal* 59, no. 2 (September 1, 1997): 177-199. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed January 15, 2011).

confirmed to us, by Signs, and Wonders, and divers Gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to the good pleasure of Almighty God.”<sup>88</sup>

The succession of reliance and unity continued as the *Second London Confession* became the framework upon which the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* was adopted in America in 1742. Other than adding two additional articles (one on hymn singing and one on laying on of hands) it was a reprint of its predecessor. This was the first generally used Baptist confession in America.<sup>89</sup> It continued to be used, adopted, and revised by Baptists in America for decades.<sup>90</sup> For a season it served as a source of unity for Baptist groups.<sup>91</sup> Robert Torbet writes of the significance of the *Philadelphia Baptist Confession*: “[it] became the pattern for most Baptist associations organized in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Another example of this desire being worked out within a Baptist confession took place in 1697 by a group of Keithian Baptists in the vicinity of Lower Dublin, PA. The local assembly of believers published a confession based upon the Apostles’ Creed. William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press 1969), 349, fn3. Full text of the *Philadelphia Confession of Faith* 363 – 369.

<sup>89</sup> At first this confession was known as “Keach’s Confession,” after its author, Elias Keach. Keach was the son of London minister Benjamin Keach. He pastored in America in the city of Philadelphia from 1688-1692. At that time he returned to London to pastor and during that time published the confession. It was first published in 1697. The recognition of this confession and reference to it in America by a local church was in Middletown, N. J. during a church dispute. The first associational reference was in 1724 by the Philadelphia association, but it was not adopted until September 25, 1742. William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 348-349.

<sup>90</sup> The Charleston Association in South Carolina, founded in 1751, adopted it in 1767, omitting the articles on hymn singing and laying on of hands. The association put it through four editions, revealing a continued usage in the South.

<sup>91</sup> “In 1783 the General Association of the Separate Baptists in Virginia met for the last time. To provide a standard of principles before the dissolution of the association, the Philadelphia Confession was adopted with the understanding that no one was bound to everything in it. At the union of Regular and Separate Baptists in Virginia in 1787, the confession was adopted with the provision that everyone was not bound to the strict observance of everything contained in it.” James E. Carter, “Review of Confessions of Faith Adopted by Major Baptist Bodies in the United States.” *Baptist History and Heritage* 12, no. 2 (April 1, 1977): 75-91. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 15, 2011).

<sup>92</sup> Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1963), 514.



One more confession deserves mention—the New Hampshire Confession of Faith whose influence in America is considered to have surpassed that of the *Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith*. It is the *New Hampshire Confession of Faith*.<sup>93</sup> The *New Hampshire Confession* provided a more moderate Calvinism that was more widely accepted by Baptists. It was birthed out of dissatisfaction with *The Philadelphia Confession*. “This confession became the most widely disseminated creedal confession among American Baptists.”<sup>94</sup> In the South and the West this confession received particularly large-scale acceptance. Even into the twentieth century the *New Hampshire Confession* served as the framework for various Baptist group’s confessions, including the Southern Baptists, General Association of Regular Baptists, and the American Baptists.<sup>95</sup>

Many other Baptist confessions could be referenced and developed as evidence because they are multitude. As James E. Carter has inscribed, “The trail of Baptist history is littered with confessions of faith that have been adopted by various Baptist bodies, then discarded, revised, or ignored.”<sup>96</sup> Suffice it to say, the pattern that is seen within the examples provided is the general model that can be found throughout Baptist

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<sup>93</sup> Full text of the *New Hampshire Confession of Faith* can be found in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 376 – 383.

<sup>94</sup> Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 361.

<sup>95</sup> In 1902 Landmark Baptists of the Southwest organized a General Association of Baptist churches (now the American Baptist Association), which adopted the declaration. In 1933 the General Association of Regular Baptists, composed of Northern Baptist churches protesting theological liberalism and denominational policies, was organized. This body also adopted the New Hampshire Declaration but with a premillennial interpretation of its last article. In 1925 the Southern Baptist Convention used the New Hampshire Confession as a basis for its expression of faith generally held by Southern Baptists. Ten new sections were added. That statement was then revised in 1963. James E. Carter, “Review of Confessions of Faith Adopted by Major Baptist Bodies in the United States.” *Baptist History and Heritage* 12, no. 2 (April 1, 1977): 75-91. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed January 15, 2011).

<sup>96</sup> Carter, “Review of Confessions of Faith.” 75.

history - One in which the authority of Scripture and a connection with the forefathers are respected and united in hopes that the connection with our faith heritage will be preserved and passed on.

Samuel Waldron has uncovered several critical lessons we can learn from the study of the *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith*. These lessons can be taken in broader context to include our examination of the interconnectedness of Baptist confessions of faith with one another and other man-made documents throughout the history of the church. Two of his observations are of particular relevance for our purposes: the value placed on unity, and a proper independence of judgment on the basis of the Word of God.<sup>97</sup> These two ideas, though seemingly contradictory, when brought together form the foundation for ongoing interaction with our history that is faithful biblically and historically.

Studying the faith of our ancestors reveals a large measure of humility and wisdom. Without betraying their convictions, they showed their unity with other groups within Protestant Christianity. They showed the degree of their intelligence and spiritual maturity by avoiding the novelty of originality and choosing instead “unity and the well-tried paths of doctrine.”<sup>98</sup> Waldron continues, “They sensed that novelty is often just another word for heresy.”<sup>99</sup>

Those who crafted the *1689 Confession of Faith* would have been justified had they chosen to emphasize their differences and attack the injustices being levied upon

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<sup>97</sup> Samuel E. Waldron, *1689 Baptist Confession of Faith: A Modern Exposition*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2005), 429 – 432.

<sup>98</sup> Waldron, *1689*, 429.

<sup>99</sup> Waldron, *1689*, 429.

them. Few would have faulted them, “persecuted as they had been by many of their Puritan brethren, firmly as they disagreed with their errors, to react by putting as much distance between themselves and the Congregationalists and Presbyterians as possible.”

<sup>100</sup> Instead, they chose a nobler path. We Baptists find ourselves the recipients of this legacy. The question we now face is, “How we will handle their gift and build upon it?” We may choose to ignore their legacy, but would God’s kingdom best be served as a result?

Historically speaking, even with all the anti-confessionalism among Baptists, there has been “an historic continuity of confessional testimony throughout more than 350 years of the Baptist story.”<sup>101</sup> We need not call this authoritative because each of the confessions that make up a part of the mosaic that comprises the Baptist story was meant to be local and temporary in nature. It would behoove us to recognize the consistency present within our heritage. This consistency reveals that there has been a connection to our legacy that must be maintained in an intentional way as we forge into the future and pass along our faith to future generations.

Waldron’s second point brings beautiful balance to this first point because it removes the implication that in seeking unity and cautiously handling novelty, we allow for “proper independence of judgment on the basis of the Word of God (1 Cor. 7:23).”<sup>102</sup> Though there is much dependence and usage of other confessions and their language, it is consistently shown that the writers of later confessions understood and took advantage of

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<sup>100</sup> Waldron, *1689*, 429.

<sup>101</sup> Waldron, *1689*, 429.

<sup>102</sup> Waldron, *1689*, 431.

their freedom to revise without fear. Rather than rigidly adhering to that which history passes on to us and treating it as prescriptive, we can, instead, see it as dynamic, able to be reworked in order to most effectively and accurately communicate in our context. This is the legacy we have had passed down to us; this is the legacy we must pass down to our children.

All too often Baptists have limited the significance of confessions to the time in which they were drafted. As a result, confessions have become nothing more than the position held doctrinally by a group of Baptists at a given point in time. This position causes confessions to be nothing more than artifacts serving as descriptive of a particular slice of Baptist history with no practical use in contemporary Baptist life.<sup>103</sup> We might consider taking a lesson from our Baptist forefathers and realize that “we need to sift through what is good from our heritage and pass on a valuable inheritance to others.”<sup>104</sup> The reality is that, “No interpreter of Scripture works alone. All must build on the past labours of godly predecessors.”<sup>105</sup> The wise and discerning pastor and scholar realizes the value of such historic ecclesial documents as creeds, confessions, and catechisms for the spiritual development and renewal of himself as well as others who are seeking to live as faithful followers of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>103</sup> Philip E. Thompson, “Seventeenth-Century Baptist Confessions in Context,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 29, no. 4 (December 1, 2002): 335-348, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 17, 2010).

<sup>104</sup> Art Lindsley, “C. S. Lewis on Chronological Snobbery,” *Knowing & Doing*, Spring 2003 <http://www.cslewisinstitute.org/files/webfm/aboutcslewis/LewisChronologicalSnobbery.pdf> (accessed October 26, 2010).

<sup>105</sup> Mark Sarver, “The Legitimacy and Function of Creeds,” <http://www.reformedreader.org/lfc/htm> (accessed June 10, 2010).

The biblically and historically faithful use of these resources for spiritual growth and development may require Baptists to reconnect with our historic understanding of the relationship between Tradition and Scripture. What has been considered the party line for Baptists in recent generations may not necessarily be the historic understanding of these individual terms and the relationship they share.

## CHAPTER 3

### THIS IS OUR STORY

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

-2 Thessalonians 2:15 ESV

Stories captivate us. They are at the heart of movies, music, literature, and even our lives. Strip away all the special effects, the bells and whistles, and the marketing material. A good story will stand on its own, and the stories that do often become classics. Each of us is captivated by some stories and repulsed by others, reflecting our unique tastes. Nevertheless, we all love to pull up our chairs to listen to a good story.

One of my favorite memories growing up was nestling into my Grandpap's lap and listening to one of his many stories. He had stories of growing up in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the Korean War, how he met my Grandma, and an endless reserve of other topics. I loved the fact that his stories were not make believe. They were stories about my Grandpap, and so in some way they were about me which made them deeply personal. I think he loved telling them every bit as much as I loved hearing them. Sitting on his lap and listening to his stories was, for me, a tangible experience of the power our own story possesses. The details of our lives shared with others are stories of the most deeply personal kind.

Those who have come to know Jesus Christ as Savior have a faith story. Each faith story highlights the work of God in the life of an individual or individuals at some point in time. When we tell our faith story, we are adding our contribution to the library

of stories that elevate the work of God in human history so that others can see that He is who the Scriptures say He is yesterday, today, and forever.<sup>1</sup>

For nearly two thousand years the people of God have been telling their faith stories and seeking to preserve those stories for succeeding generations. With each generation the story grows richer and fuller and continues to confirm what God repeatedly reveals to be true of Himself and His creation. This story is not make-believe; it is about our spiritual parents and grandparents. So in some ways, then, it is about us, which makes it deeply personal. This ever-expanding story is what we call tradition. Your story of how you came to know Christ is a valuable part of that tradition - a tradition that each time you share is passed on in hopes that God will impact the lives of others through your story as He impacted your life through the stories of others.

### **The Historic Relationship of Scripture and Tradition**

Protestants and Tradition are typically seen in opposition to one another, especially in the case of Baptists of all stripes. Tradition is one of the sticking points that prompted the leaders of the sixteenth-century reformation movement to take action and call for change within the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> What “tradition” had become for the leaders of the sixteenth-century Roman Catholic Church was a key factor soliciting the desire for change. For some, this change was a desire to reform the Roman Catholic

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 13:8.

<sup>2</sup> See F. F. Bruce, *Tradition: Old and New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), 13, footnote, “Luther’s appeal to Scripture alone as the standard by which councils, canon law and all other forms of ecclesiastical tradition must be tested was determined as a result of his confrontation with Johann Meier von Eck at the Leipzig disputation of 1519 and found historic expression at the Diet of Worms two years later.” See also, Hans J. Hillerbrand, *The Division of Christendom: Christianity in the Sixteenth Century* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 68-69. “The Catholic Church was perverted....And what the church taught was equally perverted – its disregard of the Bible in favor of human traditions;”

Church; for others, it meant a complete separation from the Roman Catholic Church.<sup>3</sup>

Tradition, once the servant of Scripture, had found its way to a place of superiority over and against Scripture.<sup>4</sup> The Roman Catholic Church had taken its stand on the assertion that the Church, particularly the Pope, was infallible in its words and interpretations of Scripture.<sup>5</sup> Those who would soon become Protestants rightfully stood against such assertions and instead stood for the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura*; Scripture alone is the source of authority for matters of faith and practice.

We are indebted to those who recognized the errors taking place regarding tradition in the church during the later Middle Ages. Their stand elevated Scripture to its rightful place once again and preserved the usefulness of the church's faith story as a

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<sup>3</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993), 135-136, 144-147, provides a summation of the views of tradition that were prevalent during the sixteenth century.

<sup>4</sup> During the Patristic Period of the Church, tradition literally meant, "that which has been handed down or over," and constituted "a traditional presentation of the Christian faith." Tradition was used to indicate "the manner in which Scripture had been received and interpreted within the church." It was seen as the "legacy from the Apostles, by which the church was guided and directed toward a correct interpretation of Scripture." This is the context by which the author asserts that tradition was a servant of Scripture. Alister E. McGrath, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998) 28 – 30, 38 - 45.

<sup>5</sup> In the Fourth Session of the Council of Trent, it is written of the authority of the church, "Furthermore, in order to restrain petulant spirits, It decrees, that no one, relying on his own skill, shall,--in matters of faith, and of morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, --wresting the sacred Scripture to his own senses, presume to interpret the said sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which holy mother Church,--whose it is to judge of the true sense and interpretation of the holy Scriptures,--hath held and doth hold;" *The Council of Trent the Fourth Session the Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, trans. J. Waterworth (London: Dolman, 1848),19. <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct23.html> (accessed February 2, 2010). The groundwork for Papal infallibility is rooted in Pope Boniface VIII's Bull, *Unam Sanctam*,1302, which declared, "However, one sword ought to be subordinated to the other and temporal authority, subjected to spiritual power. For since the Apostle said: 'There is no power except from God and the things that are, are ordained of God' [Rom 13:1-2], but they would not be ordained if one sword were not subordinated to the other and if the inferior one, as it were, were not led upwards by the other....Furthermore, we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff." Internet Medieval Sourcebook, ed. Paul Halsall, <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/b8-unam.html> (accessed February 3, 2010).



byproduct. We can only speculate where we, the church, would be today had these courageous warriors not righted the ecclesial ship.

However, we must be wary of erring in the other direction. As we stand firm against the distortion of tradition over and against Scripture, we Protestants will be wise to acknowledge our connection with our ecclesial tradition.<sup>6</sup> This acknowledgement needs to stand in opposition to the understanding of tradition that was articulated at the Council of Trent (1545-1563)<sup>7</sup> and simultaneously must adopt a definition of tradition that preserves the proper place of our spiritual ancestor's stories. When we do not embrace tradition in a properly understood way, we do ourselves and our heirs a spiritual disservice.<sup>8</sup> In order to fully comprehend the Protestant understanding of the place and benefit of tradition, we must retrace the concept of tradition through the Middle Ages to

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<sup>6</sup> The National Conference for Historic Christianity" met in 1977 for the purpose of calling the church to rediscover its historic roots. A document was drafted at this conference entitled, "The Chicago Call." The document was a combined effort of the 46 attendees led by Robert Webber and included Donald Bloesch. The full text of the document can be found in the Appendix Two.

<sup>7</sup> For a brief overview of the Council of Trent see, Hillerbrand, *The Division of Christendom*, 275-280. The complete text of the Council of Trent's canons and decrees can be found at <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/trentall.html> (accessed February 2, 2010). This is an electronic version of *The Council of Trent the Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Oecumenical Council of Trent*, ed. and trans. J. Waterworth (London: Dolman, 1848).

<sup>8</sup> "Scandal? We would be deluding ourselves if we thought that evangelical thinking in our day has progressed very far. Conversation with Mark Noll, Alister McGrath, Richard Mouw, Darrell Bock; moderated by Michael Maudlin" Christianity Today, August 1, 1995, <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/1995/august1/5t920a.html> (accessed February 2, 2010). Noll makes the following observation about the disservice of disregarding our historical foundations, "The time between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was one of crisis for the church. Supernaturalism was under attack. The Bible was under attack. The role of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life was under attack. And groups within the broad evangelical stream did the right thing in defending the Bible as the written Word of God, the reality of the supernatural, and the real work of the Holy Spirit. So the Holiness, fundamentalist, and Pentecostal movements were all foundationally good, but they went astray. And they did so in terms of the life of the mind by seeing their efforts as a replacement rather than a balancing act. Supernaturalism replaced nature. The work of the Holy Spirit replaced the work of the mind. Trust in the Bible replaced an openness to instruction from the world as a whole." He continues with what he believes to be the remedy, "What I would appeal for now is the development of an ability to let ancient Christian traditions provide norms for the more recent traditions-fundamentalist, Pentecostal, Holiness movements. We need to have a dialogue across the centuries so that the foundationally solid and instinctively sound aspects of those reactionary movements can be magnified and the excesses trimmed away."

the earliest days of the church. This journey acknowledges the debt we owe to those who have gone before us contending zealously for orthodox Christian faith.<sup>9</sup>

### Tradition and the Apostolic Age

The use of tradition that permeated the early church prior to, and shortly after, the establishment of the New Testament canon<sup>10</sup> best forms the framework for properly understanding the place and benefit of tradition today.<sup>11</sup> During this time there was an understanding and appreciation for the teachings of Jesus and the apostles handed down through both written and oral methods or traditions. Whether written or oral, that which was handed down was treated as normative to the life and purity of the Church. These teachings, though they did not make up Scripture, were consistent with the teachings of

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<sup>9</sup> Examples of evangelicals proposing steps to such an understanding for Protestants include: Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006). Robert Webber, *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail: Why Evangelicals are Attracted to the Liturgical Church* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1985). Also see Webber's *Ancient-Future* series. Thomas C. Oden, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Christianity* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2002).

<sup>10</sup> "For the writers of the New Testament, the term 'Scripture' meant primarily *a writing of the Old Testament*. However, within a short period, early Christian writers (such as Justin Martyr) were referring to the 'New Testament' (to be contrasted with the 'Old Testament'), and insisting that both were to be treated with equal authority. By the time of Irenaeus, it was generally accepted that there were four gospels; by the late second century, there was a consensus that the gospels, Acts, and letters had status of inspired Scripture." McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 28. Marcion is the first person known to list a definite collection of what should be called the New Testament books. There may have been others before him but we cannot know for certain at this point. Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, was the first to list the twenty-seven books that make up the New Testament. He did this in his thirty-ninth festal letter, announcing the date of Easter in A. D. 367. F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 134, 209. See also, C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament, Third Edition, Black's New Testament Commentaries*, ed. Henry Chadwick (New York: Continuum, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> During this time tradition and Scripture were so closely linked that the origination of the Gospels is connected to the role of Christian tradition. Gerhardsson has written, "the question of how the Gospels originated is part of the greater question of the authenticity and reliability of the Christian tradition. The evidence agrees on this point. There is general agreement that all four Gospels derive from well known, reliable traditionists who stand at one or two removes from Jesus Christ." Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory & Manuscript: Oral Tradition and Written Transmission in Rabbinic Judaism and Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 194.

the Old Testament Scripture as well as what would later become the New Testament writings. They did not stand above Scripture. They were more like summaries that captured the essential teachings of the faith in ways that people could pass from person to person and generation to generation. They were stories that carried the content of the Christian church's faith story within them. Early believers wanted the teachings of the faith to be taught, captured, and passed on.<sup>12</sup> Though this may seem unusual for those of us accustomed to a culture in which vital information is passed on primarily in written form so it can be stored and verified, oral transmission of information was normative in the first century. Teachers and learners were used to being meticulous about grasping and passing on information accurately through oral transmission. The use of story for the transmission of faith was perhaps more natural an exercise for them than Bible Studies and workbooks are for us.

Evidence reveals these teachings spread throughout the Christian church before and during the writing of the New Testament. Even before the letters and writings of the New Testament were completed and circulating there was an unwritten oral testimony used to teach the essential beliefs of the Christian faith. Both Roman Catholics and evangelical Protestants have agreed upon this fact for quite some time.<sup>13</sup> Examples of this unwritten oral testimony can be found in Paul's letters to various churches found in the New Testament. Given Paul's background we should not be surprised to find such evidence. Paul was thoroughly trained in Jewish law in the city of Jerusalem under

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<sup>12</sup> 2 Timothy 2:2 reveals the early church's passion for receiving teaching, internalizing it, then passing it on to others for the purpose of keeping the teaching alive from generation to generation. "...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

<sup>13</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Tradition: Old and New*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1970), 39ff.

Gamaliel.<sup>14</sup> In his letter to the Galatian church he writes of himself, “I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.”<sup>15</sup> These words reveal that Paul was appreciative and highly passionate about the stories of his fathers that had been passed down to him. Faith in Christ did not cause him to abandon his appreciation and passion; instead, it sanctified it. His New Testament letters reveal that Paul sought to preserve much of the Jewish tradition he had learned from his rabbinical education. Paul was able to appreciate the value of these Jewish traditions in proclaiming the gospel. He expanded upon this tradition, using it to declare the gospel. In this way Jesus became the content and authority of the Jewish tradition that had been passed down to him.

In addition, Paul’s letters reveal a usage and development of the uniquely Christian tradition passed down through the oral transmission of stories.<sup>16</sup> There are two places in his second letter to the Corinthian church in which Paul speaks of a normative standard that the church already had concerning its customs. In 1 Corinthians 11:2 Paul writes, “Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the *traditions* even as I delivered them to you”<sup>17</sup> (*emphasis mine*). Paul is speaking to the Corinthian believers concerning order within the church. He addresses how the Lord’s

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<sup>14</sup> Acts 22:3. Gamaliel was a highly regarded Jewish teacher who was renowned for his wisdom and ability to interpret the Law. “His learning was so eminent and his character so revered that he is one of the seven who, among Jewish doctors only, have been honored with the title of *Rabban*.” He was the grandson of the great Hillel. He was a member of the Sanhedrin and the leader of the more liberal wing of the Pharisees. E. F. Harrison, *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, ed. E. N. Longenecker and M. C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1974), 251-260.

<sup>15</sup> Galatians 1:14.

<sup>16</sup> D. H. Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition & Renewing Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 51.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:2.

Supper is to be observed so that followers of Jesus Christ demonstrate practices consistent with an established normative standard. In 1 Corinthians 15:3 Paul writes, “For I *delivered* to you as of first importance what I also *received*: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures” (*emphasis mine*). In this instance Paul is speaking to the church on a doctrinal level concerning how to interpret the Old Testament from a tradition that was clearly begun prior to Paul and had been passed on to him. The testimony and presence of witnesses is actually included as part of the delivery. Paul received the message with the verification that the risen Christ had appeared to multiple people on various occasions and he meticulously includes it in the message delivered to the Corinthian believers. He was passing it on to the Corinthians for their benefit. The list of witnesses offers support for the message and an opportunity for verification that what Paul was saying was being accurately and truthfully passed down to the Corinthians, since many of these people listed would still have been alive.

It is especially clear in chapter 15 that Paul sees what has been passed on to him as tradition concerning Jesus Christ being “in accordance with the Scriptures,”<sup>18</sup> not in opposition to them. D. H. Williams believes that Paul’s usage of revelation and tradition are actually “two sides of one coin.” He sees “no tension between the gospel as revelation and the gospel as tradition.”<sup>19</sup> Paul’s statements appear to convey that the church’s oral tradition was a vital part of the process of inspiration that the New Testament came out of instead of standing against the process. Williams writes that the

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<sup>18</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3. Paul is here referring to the Old Testament likely in its entirety and not just a particular passage. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987) 725.

<sup>19</sup> D. H. Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 33.

tradition “was a critical means by which the risen Lord had imparted his revelation through the working of the Spirit.”<sup>20</sup> These examples, and others from Paul’s writings, uncover the symbiotic relationship that Paul perceived between gospel and tradition.

Paul’s second letter to the church at Thessalonica provides an additional instance for consideration. He writes, “So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.”<sup>21</sup> These few examples provide us with the church’s first articulation of a tradition. In Greek, the word used to convey this tradition is *paradoseis* meaning “a dynamic of handing over and receiving or a living and active transmission of the church’s preaching.”<sup>22</sup> At the same time the church was expanding through the mission efforts of the apostles and the New Testament was being written, an unwritten oral tradition was circulating through the church that spread the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles. This unwritten oral tradition was used to provide everyone from new converts to church leaders with a summary of that which comprised the gospel message. These were not make-believe stories. They were deeply personal stories about real people whose lives had been transformed by the gospel.

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<sup>20</sup> Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition*, 33.

<sup>21</sup> 2 Thessalonians 2:15.

<sup>22</sup> Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition*, 33. Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller. *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. Baker's Greek New Testament library, 4. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), **παράδοσις**, εως, ἡ as an action *handing down* or *over*; in the NT in a passive sense, as teachings about ways of doing things that are handed down from generation to generation *tradition* (MT 15.2); as Christian doctrine handed down *teaching, instruction, tradition* (2TH 2.15). James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Showing Every Word of the Text of the Common English Version of the Canonical Books, and Every Occurrence of Each Word in Regular Order*. electronic ed. (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1996). **3862 παράδοσις** [*paradosis* /par·ad·os·is/] n f. From 3860; 13 occurrences; AV translates as “tradition” 12 times, and “ordinance” once. **1** giving up, giving over. 1a the act of giving up. 1b the surrender of cities. **2** a giving over which is done by word of mouth or in writing, i.e. tradition by instruction, narrative, precept, etc. 2a objectively, that which is delivered, the substance of a teaching. 2b of the body of precepts, esp. ritual, which in the opinion of the later Jews were orally delivered by Moses and orally transmitted in unbroken succession to subsequent generations, which precepts, both illustrating and expanding the written law, as they did were to be obeyed with equal reverence.

Paul's letter to the Thessalonian church gives evidence in support of the belief that "the language of tradition became the *modus operandi* for expressing the transmission of the apostle's teaching, which was reflective of the Lord's own proclamation."<sup>23</sup>

For the earliest Christians there was a distinction between the written Word and that which was passed on orally, but the difference was not significant. "There is no question that the Christian Tradition, expressed in the kerygmatic, ethical, and worshipful life of the churches, preceded the Christian writings, and functioned completely authoritative before the advent of the New Testament."<sup>24</sup> Thomas C. Oden writes, "The oral tradition of apostolic preaching preceded the written tradition of New Testament Scripture."<sup>25</sup> The early church's respect for and dependence upon both the oral tradition and the written Word ran deep, but as the church matured and passed the mantle of leadership to the next generation the oral tradition began to fade.<sup>26</sup> By the middle of the third century only that which was witnessed in Scripture remained and was recorded.<sup>27</sup> The church's faith story was experiencing a transition. Its preservation and transmission would now be primarily seen as written. The story itself was meant to remain deeply personal and life changing.

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<sup>23</sup> Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition*, 35-36.

<sup>24</sup> Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition*, 68.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1992), 175.

<sup>26</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (New York, NY: Longmans, Green and Co., 1950), 1-130. The first two chapters of this work provide a historical overview of the development of creeds from the first through the third centuries.

<sup>27</sup> R. P. C. Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 50-51.

## Tradition and the Patristic Age

The next several generations of ecclesiastical leaders who left us a written record are commonly known as the Early Church Fathers.<sup>28</sup> This period of church history was critical to the formation of the New Testament. Within the writings of the Early Church Fathers the tradition spoken of by Paul is often referred to as the “rule of faith” or *regula fidei*.<sup>29</sup> This term was used regularly by many of the Early Church Fathers from the end of the second century in reference to what they considered sound doctrine of the Christian faith as passed down from the apostle’s and, ultimately, Jesus’ teachings. Irenaeus was one such Father who used this term. The rule of faith was critical to his battle with the Gnostic attack on the Christian faith. In his use of tradition he never placed the rule of faith in opposition to or in superiority over Scripture.<sup>30</sup> It was necessary for Irenaeus to utilize tradition in conjunction with Scripture because of the nature of the Gnostic attack.

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<sup>28</sup> This era of Church History is also referred to as the Patristic period and is generally viewed as spanning the second to the sixth century. For an overview of this period of church history see, Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 5-21.

<sup>29</sup> The rule of faith provided the early church with the boundaries for interpretation of Scripture by providing the narrative storyline of Scripture. It was an oral tradition that had been passed from apostles which appears in several forms throughout the writings of the early church. These summaries of the rule of faith all consist of the same basic elements; “one God the Creator and Father, Jesus Christ his Son who came from heaven to earth to restore all things, the Holy Spirit, and the coming Resurrection and judgement of mankind.” Stuart G. Hall, “The Early Idea of the Church,” in *The First Christian Theologians*, ed. G. R. Evans (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004), 48. The following is an example of one of Irenaeus’ summaries of the rule of faith found in his writings, “The Church, although scattered over the whole world even to its extremities, received from the Apostles and their disciples the faith in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth...and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who by the prophets proclaimed the dispensations, the advents, the virgin birth, the passion and resurrection from the dead, the bodily ascension of the well-beloved Christ Jesus our Lord into heaven, and his Parousia from the heavens in the glory of the Father to gather all things up in Himself...Christ Jesus our Lord and God, our Saviour and King.” *Against Heresies* 1.10.1.

<sup>30</sup> Frances Young, *The Interpretation of Scripture*, in *The First Christian Theologians: An Introduction to Theology in the Early Church*, ed. G. R. Evans (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2004) 24 - 25. Though the New Testament Canon was not completely fixed until later, the list of books which Irenaeus’ writings reveal is nearly the same as that which was eventually accepted by the Church.



The Gnostics would twist Scripture, claiming mystical and hidden interpretations that only the most spiritually mature could attain. Therefore, Irenaeus used tradition *with* Scripture to reveal that the way in which the apostles interpreted Scripture had been carried on with continuity through each generation of the Church and thereby constituted an authorized way of interpreting Scripture.<sup>31</sup> The church's story provided a frame of reference.

It is the bedrock for an evangelical understanding of Scripture that we understand tradition as did Irenaeus. According to Irenaeus, tradition is “a traditional way of interpreting Scripture within the community of faith.” This is also known as the “single source theory of tradition.”<sup>32</sup> Irenaeus refers to the rule of faith as the tradition of the church, meaning the official church teaching that is in agreement with and a summary of what is found in Scripture. “His real defence of orthodoxy was founded in Scripture. Indeed, tradition itself, on his view, was confirmed by Scripture which was ‘the foundation and pillar of faith’.”<sup>33</sup> J. N. D. Kelly summarizes Irenaeus' understanding of the relationship between the rule of faith, or tradition, and Scripture by observing that Irenaeus suggested that when men had a firm grasp on the teachings they received in preparation for baptism, it was a strong aid for them in protecting Scripture from distorted interpretations. He called this teaching “the canon of the truth,” and believed, “this ‘canon’, so far from being something distinct from Scripture, was simply a condensation of the message contained in it.”<sup>34</sup> Irenaeus wrote the following about the

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<sup>31</sup> McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 40.

<sup>32</sup> McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 40.

<sup>33</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), 38-39.

<sup>34</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 38-39.

continuity of the message found in the writings of the apostles and the rule of faith:

“Even if the apostles had not left their writings to us, ought we not to follow the rule of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they committed the churches?”<sup>35</sup>

Just as was the case for the apostle Paul, for Irenaeus there was no dichotomy between Scripture and the unwritten oral tradition of the church; rather, the content of each was indistinguishable from the other. “If tradition as conveyed in the ‘canon’ is a more trustworthy guide, this is not because it comprises truths other than those revealed in Scripture, but because the true tenor of the apostolic message is there unambiguously set out.”<sup>36</sup>

Irenaeus’ understanding of the “rule of faith” or unwritten church tradition during the early days of the church is consistent with the lion’s share of teaching found throughout this period of the Christian church. The use of the *regula fidei* within the works of the church fathers is consistent with the earlier church as well. It serves as a summary of the teachings that are found in Scripture that helps teach what Christians are to believe. It serves as more than just an abstract of the gospel message, it is rooted in stories that connect the listener to the larger faith story. The rule of faith did not add anything to the Scriptures, nor did it stand in contrast to the Word of God. Rather, it was like a light shining brightly on the message of Scripture. As such, it could be used to identify heresy and guard against the false teachings that arose out of heretical beliefs.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III.4.1.

<sup>36</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 39.

<sup>37</sup> Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church*, 93. Hanson writes, “...the rule was simply an account, divided into subjects, of the content of the preaching and teaching of the Church contemporary with the writer who mentions or quotes the rule of faith. This would account for the fact that while the rule preserves a general similarity everywhere it varies in details from place to place and from writer to writer;

Even Tertullian, who extended the rule of faith to include those practices and beliefs which had been customary throughout the church for several generations, did not deviate from the primary sense of the *regula fidei* when understood as “the apostolic, evangelical or Catholic tradition [which] stood for the faith delivered by the apostles.”<sup>38</sup>

It was not until later that the rule of faith came to embody the whole of official church teaching,<sup>39</sup> even if these teachings could not be substantiated from the pages of the Canon of Scripture. This evolution of the rule of faith is what led the reformers to hold fast their teaching of *Sola Scriptura*, i.e., the belief that Scripture alone is the rule or authority of faith and practice. This is a position which the early church fathers would have had no problem espousing themselves. For them, the rule of faith was found within the pages of, and submitted to the authority of, the Canon of Scripture.<sup>40</sup>

It is important for those of us in the twenty-first century to step back into the early centuries of the church, particularly the second through the fifth, that we may understand why the rule of faith had such significance for the early church fathers. Study of this period of church history is critical because godly men of this era wrestled with and articulated their theology surrounded by “the mystery religions, polytheism, Gnosticism,

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it would explain why the rule tends to run into doctrinal or speculative elaboration with some fathers, and why it looks like material used for teaching, perhaps for catechetical teaching before baptism, rather than a cut-and-dried formula used at the rite of baptism itself. Above all, it would explain why the rule can be used against heretics, and why, though it is closely associated with Scripture, and often proved from Scripture, it is not regarded as in form precisely the same as Scripture.”

<sup>38</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 39.

<sup>39</sup> As the Church transitioned from the Patristic period the understanding of the rule of faith began to increasingly take on this understanding. At the Council of Trent, 1545 – 1563, it was officially adopted by the Roman Catholic Church. See, Council of Trent, Session IV, <http://www.americancatholictruthsociety.com/docs/TRENT/trent4.htm> (accessed October 5, 2011).

<sup>40</sup> M. E. Osterhaven, “Rule of Faith,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Edition, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 1043.

cults such as Manichaeism, and the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, Stoicism, and Neoplatonism.”<sup>41</sup> While being surrounded by these competing influences, the Fathers of the early church also found themselves in a position in which their theology benefitted from their proximity to the New Testament era. They enjoyed “historical, geographical, linguistic, and conceptual proximity”<sup>42</sup> which fed their desire to achieve consistent and sustained faithfulness to the apostolic tradition as passed down to them.<sup>43</sup>

Critical to this understanding is the nature of the early church fathers’ struggle with heresy and those who advocated it. Irenaeus’ example has shown a tactic often used by those who taught heresy. They often spread their heretical teachings through twisting the teachings of Scripture, finding their support for heresy directly from the Word of God. False teachers were often masters of twisting the message of Scripture to suit their heretical teachings. One scholar has summarized this battle in the following way, “There have always been those who believed that an issue of Christian doctrine could be settled simply by an appeal to the Bible.” He continues, “However, the great theological debates of the patristic period showed that this approach was seriously flawed.”<sup>44</sup> Larger connections to our faith story appear to be more vital than we may first realize.

The Gnostics, for example, used Scripture to support their mythological structure and their attempts to explain the problem of evil through various forms of dualism. Their teachings were opposed by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and the apostle John. The Gnostics were

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 27-28.

<sup>42</sup> Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith*, 27-28.

<sup>43</sup> Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith*, 27-28.

<sup>44</sup> McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 38.

so astute and studied in Scripture that they were actually the first to compile a commentary on the gospel according to John. Gnostic interpreters were also keenly interested in the book of Genesis and Paul's New Testament letters. As a result of their use and twisting of Scripture, they welcomed debate that centered on and in Scripture. The Church Fathers who opposed them found a powerful source in the rule of faith since it clearly summarized the teachings found in Scripture in a way that taught the average person sound doctrine and opposed manipulated interpretations of the Bible.<sup>45</sup> The Gnostics were unable to produce such material support for their interpretations.

The fourth-century battle with Arianism offers another example of heretical teachings finding their basis in the teaching of Scripture. Those who advocated the Arian position concerning the deity of Jesus Christ were so confident in their interpretation of Scripture that when their opponents at the Council of Nicaea suggested that the church's position on the deity of Jesus Christ be clearly laid out using only terminology that was found in Scripture, they cheered. They could cheer because they had relied heavily upon an astounding collection of Scriptural texts to support their central point.<sup>46</sup> Ultimately, the debate with Arianism was won through the development of the Nicene Creed<sup>47</sup> which,

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<sup>45</sup> G. L. Borchert, "Gnosticism," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 485-488.

<sup>46</sup> Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 223-251, provides an overview of the proceedings of the Council of Nicaea and the approach the Arians used in seeking to win the day.

<sup>47</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Church History: Volume One From Christ to Pre-Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 195. The Nicene Creed adopted by the church in A. D. 325 reads, "We believe in one God the Father All-sovereign, maker of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, only-begotten, that is, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance [homo-ousion] with the Father, through whom all things were made, things in heaven and things on the earth; who for us men and for our salvation came down and was made flesh, and became man, suffered, and rose on the third day, ascended into the heavens, is coming to judge the living and the dead; and in the Holy Spirit. And those who say "There was when he was not," and, "Before he was begotten he was not," and that, "He came into being from what is-not," or those who allege that the Son of God is "of another substance or essence," or

like the rule of faith, is extra-biblical but summarizes the teachings which the orthodox church<sup>48</sup> found explicitly and implicitly in Scripture. Though doctrinal, it is connected to real stories, real struggles, and real people who were “extremely zealous” for the glory of God and the purity of the church in their day. Like the Apostle Paul before them, their zealous hearts burned for Scripture and tradition in the preservation and declaration of the gospel. Though creeds like this often used terminology not found in Scripture, the concepts that the terminology explicates are found implicitly throughout Scripture.<sup>49</sup> The patristic writers found the development of these creeds necessary because, “It was not enough simply to quote the Bible; it was necessary to interpret it in an orthodox manner...for many patristic writers, an appeal to tradition was of major importance in challenging unorthodox interpretations of Scripture or teachings.”<sup>50</sup>

The introduction of creeds into the church during the ensuing centuries introduced another method by which the church could pass along the teachings of Scripture in summary fashion.<sup>51</sup> These creeds were developed by ecumenical church councils in

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“created,” or “changeable,” or “alterable,” these the catholic and apostolic church anathematizes. An examination of this creed reveals the consistency it shares with the earlier summaries of the church in that it comprises the elements that make up the gospel.

<sup>48</sup> This and all references to the church as orthodox should to be understood as conforming to the Christian faith as represented in the creeds of the early church, rather than pertaining to or designating the Eastern Church.

<sup>49</sup> Much of the debate that took place at the Council of Nicaea was over three Greek words that were not in Scripture but were meant to describe the relationship between God the Father and the Son. The word that was settled upon is the word *homo-ousion*, which carries with it the idea that the Son is of the same nature as the Father. Though this word is not found in Scripture the idea that the Son of God is of the same nature as the Father is taught throughout the Old and New Testament.

<sup>50</sup> McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 38.

<sup>51</sup> Three creeds of the early church have received particular prominence within the life of the church; they are the Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed (381) which was an expansion of the Creed of Nicaea (325) that removed the anathemas, the Apostle’s Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. See Appendix One for full text of each of these three creeds.

response to heretical teaching that was seeking to infiltrate the church and corrupt the teachings of Jesus Christ and the apostles. In response to these onslaughts the leaders of the church came together and clarified what the orthodox belief of the church was as opposed to heresy.

The Church saw the rule of faith and the creeds as useful tools for battling heresy. Their usefulness to the church extended also to teaching those who were new to the faith the essential beliefs and convictions inherent to being a follower of Jesus Christ. Catechumen, or candidates for Christian baptism, went through an extensive time of training which often included committing to memory the Apostle's Creed<sup>52</sup> as well as other essential teaching for spiritual growth and maturity. This was a culture in which most people who became followers of Jesus Christ did not have access to their own personal copy of the Old or New Testament. So these baptismal confessions were critical to passing along the basic essentials for the Christian life in ways that would remain with the candidate as a foundation upon which to know and live out their Christian faith.

These new followers of Jesus Christ came from a Greco-Roman cultural background in which the conversion experience associated with becoming a Christian was foreign to their understanding of religious practice. They did not have the Jewish cultural framework in which they could associate what was taking place in their lives as a result of their newfound faith. With each passing generation of non-Jewish converts it became more and more essential to provide them with an understanding of what it meant to be a follower of Jesus Christ both on a doctrinal and practical level.<sup>53</sup> These traditions

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<sup>52</sup> See Appendix One for full text of the Apostle's Creed.

<sup>53</sup> Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition*, 27-32.

and the ensuing creeds provided a memorable summary of the essential doctrines that comprise the faith. With the threat of heresy ever at the doorstep of Christianity, the importance of this time prior to baptism could not be overemphasized. Catechumen needed to be connected to the larger story of the church or spiritual shipwreck was all but certain.

Today we are not entirely certain what the *regula fidei* looked like or what exactly it contained; however, we do have the testimony of the church creeds. These creeds remain a source of right doctrine for much of the Christian Church. They have served as a connection with the historical church and her battle for orthodoxy in the face of great heresies which threatened to derail the purity and purpose of the church. The presence of the rule of the faith, baptismal confessions, and church creeds are clear evidence that “the early church has defined the theological issues and established the framework or the ‘rules’ in which the church does its theological reflection.”<sup>54</sup> As our postmodern culture gravitates more and more in the direction of narrative and story, the value of these early church creeds and confessions can be seen with even greater clarity.<sup>55</sup> Each is connected to the narrative of the church; therefore, it is a part of our story. When we connect these doctrinal summaries with the people and circumstances from which they developed, we expand the listener’s faith story collection that has the potential to enrich their faith. By making their library of tradition more personal, we maximize the opportunity to render abstract doctrines more meaningful and practical. Our current culture is different from

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<sup>54</sup> Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith*, 28.

<sup>55</sup> At a minimum the author holds that the four major creedal documents of the early church consisting of; The Apostle’s Creed, The Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed, The Definition of Chalcedon, and The Athanasian Creed, should be included in the church’s collection of resources. Full text of all four can be found in the Appendix One.



these early centuries, and yet it is also similar. By maintaining our high view of Scripture and wedding it with an appreciation for the relevance of these gospel summaries, we may see some of the same renewal tendencies in our twenty-first century churches that were evident within the patristic church. These are not just doctrinal summaries - they are faith stories that are deeply personal because in some way they are about us.

### **Tradition and the Reformation**

For much of Church history the relationship of Scripture and tradition remained as it was during the time of the apostles and the patristic church. During the last five centuries the relationship between the two has gone through a transition and elicited a great deal of controversy. In the early life of the Church, tradition was understood to be a summary of the content of Scripture; this view was gradually replaced with the belief that tradition was an unwritten source of information separate from Scripture, passed down through apostolic succession.<sup>56</sup> The change in belief increased the power of the papacy as an infallible source of truth, since the papacy was an extension of apostolic authority based upon a belief in apostolic succession. This progression of power resulted largely from a realization that certain doctrines within Roman Catholic tradition could not be demonstrated from the Bible. Finally, at the Council of Trent<sup>57</sup> the following official decree was made declaring the place of the authority of tradition over and against Scripture:

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<sup>56</sup> Council of Trent 1545 – 1563, Session IV, <http://www.americancatholictruthsociety.com/docs/TRENT/trent4.htm> (accessed October 5, 2011).

<sup>57</sup> See footnote 5 for resources that provide overviews of the Council of Trent.

The holy, ecumenical and general Council of Trent...keeps this constantly in view, namely, that the purity of the Gospel may be preserved in the Church after the errors have been removed.... It also clearly perceives that these truths and rules are contained in the written books and unwritten traditions which have come down to us, having been received by the apostles from the mouth of Christ himself....Following, then, the example of the orthodox Fathers, it receives and venerates with the same piety and reverence all the books of both the Old and New Testaments – for God is the author of both – together with all traditions concerning faith and morals, for they come from the mouth of Christ or are inspired by the Holy Spirit and have been preserved in continuous succession in the Catholic Church.<sup>58</sup>

It is vitally important to an understanding and use of the teachings of our Christian heritage to remember this was not the original position held by the Church when it came to tradition. This statement was made sixteen centuries after the establishment of the Christian church. It was at this time that the assertion was made that the “Roman church...is the official interpreter of faith [and] no one is to interpret Scriptures for himself in a way that is contrary to the Roman Catholic interpretation.”<sup>59</sup> When this statement stands side by side with the teachings of the Early Church Fathers, the shift in the view should be evident, i.e., the move away from viewing Scripture as the authority and guide to the Roman Catholic Church and, more specifically, to the Pope as the final authority and guide to faith.<sup>60</sup>

The Council of Trent’s statement came as a result of the cries for church reform that reached their pinnacle in the sixteenth century through Martin Luther and other

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<sup>58</sup> Josef Neuner, S. J., and Heinrich Roos, S. J., *The Teaching of the Catholic Church*, ed. Karl Rahner, S. J. (Staten Island, NY: Alba, 1967), 59, as quoted in Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1989), 528.

<sup>59</sup> Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1989), 529.

<sup>60</sup> Vatican II has made efforts to bring the authority of the Pope into a greater degree of balance. See *Lumen Gentium, Chapter III, On the Hierarchical Structure of the Church and in Particular on the Episcopate*, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html) (accessed October 5, 2011).

Protestant reformers. Martin Luther wanted to reclaim the position of the Apostles and the Patristics. In response, Roman Catholics were solidifying the infallible authority of the papacy. Martin Luther reclaimed his position largely through his stand on the principle of *Sola Scriptura*. For Luther, this “formal principle”<sup>61</sup> of the Reformation did not constitute a rejection of tradition altogether but instead a return to the single-source theory that was the heartbeat of the Apostles’ and the Patristics’ stand against those heresies that interpreted Scripture in twisted ways to suit their own agendas. “Luther did not simply throw away the preceding 1,500 years of church history.”<sup>62</sup> He was arguing against the two-source theory of tradition that was being practiced and would soon be articulated by the Roman Catholic Church at the Council of Trent. His desire was to “safeguard the authority of Scripture from that servile dependence upon the church which in fact made Scripture inferior to the church.”<sup>63</sup>

The two-source understanding of revelation had been developing within the church for several centuries by the time of Martin Luther. Throughout the Middle Ages it had found little overall support, and full development did not occur until the fourteenth-century. Prior to that there are hints at a two-source theory of revelation in the works of Basil and Augustine.<sup>64</sup> These hints were used by twelfth-century canon lawyers as

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<sup>61</sup> *Sola Scriptura* is known as the formal principle of the Reformation because it is the source and norm of all the other four principles that govern the Reformation.

<sup>62</sup> Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 81.

<sup>63</sup> George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 81.

<sup>64</sup> Basil the Great is one of the Cappadocian Fathers and played an important role in the church’s developing understanding of Tradition. In seeking to defend the shared nature of the Holy Spirit with the Father and the Son against opponents Basil utilized first the Scriptures alone. His opponents challenged his conclusions because the Scriptures never actually describe the deity of the Holy Spirit as together with the Father and the Son. They were willing to concede the uniqueness of the Holy Spirit but not the shared nature of the Trinity. Basil acknowledges their point and proceeds to support the deity of the Holy Spirit from the testimony of the church. “Among the ‘doctrines’ and the ‘definitions’ preserved in the Church,

support for their step away from a single-source theory of revelation. In the fourteenth-century William of Ockham is often credited with being the first to fully develop the two-source theory,<sup>65</sup> and from then on the two theories, single- and double-source, were developing side by side and competing for prominence.<sup>66</sup>

What Martin Luther and John Calvin were doing with their emphasis upon *Sola Scriptura* was calling the church back to its roots. These men, who were part of the leadership within the Magisterial Reformation and should not be confused with those

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we hold some on the basis of written teaching and others we have received, transmitted secretly, from apostolic tradition. All are of equal value for piety; no one will dispute this: no one, at least with the least experience of ecclesiastical customs; for if we were to attempt to reject these unwritten customs as not carrying much weight, we should unwittingly be casting aspersions on the Gospel itself, in its essentials.” Basil’s attempts at this demonstrate something without the explicit testimony of Scripture has concerned some throughout the history of the church. Basil and David Anderson, *On the Holy Spirit*, (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), 98-99. Augustine’s writings reveal what appears to be a wrestling between a one-source and a two-source view of revelation. At times his writings are openly and boldly rooted in a one-source view that highly exalts the authority and exclusivity of Scripture. For example he writes, “Let those things be removed from our midst which we quote against each other not from divine canonical books but from elsewhere. Someone may perhaps ask: Why do you want to remove these things from the midst? Because I do not want the holy church proved by human documents but by divine oracles.” Augustine, *De unitate ecclesiae*, in William Goode, *The Divine Rule of Faith and Practice Or, A Defence of the Catholic Doctrine That Holy Scripture Has Been Since the Times of the Apostles the Sole Divine Rule of Faith and Practice to the Church, against the Dangerous Errors of the Authors of the Tracts for the Times, and the Romanists, As, Particularly, That the Rule of Faith Is "Made Up of Scripture and Tradition Together;" &C. In Which Also the Doctrines of the Apostolic Succession, the Eucharistic Sacrifice, &C. Are Fully Discussed* (London: J. Hatchard and son, 1842). In other places Augustine would appear to agree with the assertions of Basil when it comes to the authority of the church. As an example he writes, “‘The apostles,’ indeed, ‘gave no injunctions on the point;’ but the custom, which is opposed to Cyprian, may be supposed to have had its origin in apostolic tradition, just as there are many things which are observed by the whole Church, and therefore are fairly held to have been enjoined by the apostles, which yet are not mentioned in their writings.” Augustine, *On Baptism Against the Donatists*, 4:23:31, in Philip Schaff, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church: Second Series*, [NPNF<sup>2</sup>] (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf104.v.iv.vii.xxiii.html> (accessed August 25, 2011). To be fair, Augustine’s view seems to be a work in progress. Neither man comes out and asserts that Tradition has equal authority with Scripture and certainly is not held above Scripture by either; however, both open the door for what was to come in the Middle Ages.

<sup>65</sup> For a summary of Ockham’s development of the two-source theory see, Keith A. Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, (Moscow, Idaho: Canon Press, 2001), 78-79. Ockham’s writings regarding papal infallibility have often been understood as developing this theory. However, recent study has questioned the validity of this claim. For a treatment of this debate see, John Kilcullen, “Ockham and Infallibility,” *Journal of Religious History* 16, no. 4 (December 1, 1991): 387-409. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed August 26, 2011).

<sup>66</sup> Keith A. Mathison, “Sola Scriptura,” in, *After Darkness Light: Essays in Honor of R. C. Sproul*, ed. R. C. Sproul Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2003), 34-35.

personalities advocating for radical reformation, had a positive view of the role of tradition. Theirs was a view that was consistent with what they saw as the norm throughout church history. While Roman Catholics were arguing that the Church's interpretations took precedence over the Scriptures for reasons such as the fact that the church defined the canon of Scripture, these Reformers were arguing that "the authority of popes, councils, and theologians [was] subordinate to Scripture." And, "authority within the church does not derive from the status of the office-bearers, but from the Word of God which they serve."<sup>67</sup>

These efforts to maintain the superiority of Scripture were kept in balance with a respect for the tradition of the church. John Calvin weighed in on the authority of Scripture and tradition and the relationship between the two, placing the Word of God alone "beyond the sphere of our judgment."<sup>68</sup> Speaking of church councils and the fathers, John Calvin wrote, "Fathers and Councils are of authority only in so far as they agree with the rule of the Word."<sup>69</sup> In spite of this understanding, Calvin concluded, "We still give to councils and fathers such rank and honour as it is appropriate for them to hold under Christ."<sup>70</sup> Calvin maintained the earlier Church's recognition of the place and importance of the tradition.

At the same time that the magisterial reformers recognized the danger inherent in the direction in which the Roman Catholic Church was headed regarding the sources of revelation, they also recognized there was a ditch on the other side of the ecclesial road

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<sup>67</sup> McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 179.

<sup>68</sup> John Calvin, quoted in McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 179.

<sup>69</sup> John Calvin, quoted in McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 179.

<sup>70</sup> John Calvin, quoted in McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 179.

that equally threatened the purity of the church. At one end of the pendulum was the Roman Catholic Church who placed the authority of the Church above the authority of Scripture. At the other end of the pendulum was a complete disregard for any adherence to creedal formulations that had been established throughout church history. The result was that in the local church “the private judgment of the individual [is placed] above the corporate judgment of the church.”<sup>71</sup> This was a step beyond the scope the magisterial reformers were willing to go because they believed it was a step outside the testimony of the Apostles or the Patristics. They could not find justification for this total rejection of tradition for the purpose of making Scripture the sole authority for faith and practice. For the classical reformers “*Sola scriptura* was not *nuda scriptura*.”<sup>72</sup> They understood the sufficiency of Scripture functioning in the context of the church “gathered and guided by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>73</sup> They could not conceive of Scripture and tradition standing in opposition, so they never boiled the issue down to one of Scripture or tradition. The uniqueness of the classical reformers during this time over against both ends of the pendulum was their insistence upon the “coinherence of Scripture and tradition.”<sup>74</sup>

Those calling for a more sweeping rejection of tradition were known as the radical reformers. At the same time the move for reformation within the church was taking place, this more extreme group of reformers was calling for reform from outside the church. They espoused a view of Scripture and tradition that could best be described with the term *Solo Scriptura* instead of *Sola Scriptura*. Their conviction was that

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<sup>71</sup> Mathison, “*Sola Scriptura*,” 37.

<sup>72</sup> George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 81-82.

<sup>73</sup> George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 81-82.

<sup>74</sup> George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 81-82.

Scripture is the *only* authority. Alister McGrath writes of the radical's position, "For radicals such as Thomas Muntzer and Caspar Schwenkfeld, every individual had the right to interpret Scripture as he pleased, subjected to the guidance of the Holy Spirit."<sup>75</sup> This paved the way for the rise of individualism in interpretation of Scripture. This kind of interpretation removed the accountability inherently present when the tradition of the Church is allowed to speak under the authority of the Scriptures, thereby revealing orthodox historical interpretations held by the Church. While Roman Catholics placed the power of the church as an authority over Scripture, the radicals ran the risk of placing the power of personal experience over the authority of Scripture. Not all radicals went to this extreme, but there were those who followed the premise of their convictions concerning the relationship of the Word and the Spirit to this detrimental conclusion.<sup>76</sup>

The various branches that made up the radical reformers during this time, and their individual expressions, are beyond the scope of this work. In general it can be stated that there were those under the umbrella of the radical reformers who called for a radical separation from the church and *all* its classical authorities, and there were others who called for a return to the age of the apostles through *only* the New Testament and the Holy Spirit which would thereby "[free] the church from the suffocating growth of ecclesiastical tradition."<sup>77</sup> Both moved away from maintaining a measure of trust in the tradition held and affirmed by the apostolic and patristic church possessing little or no regard for anything beyond the Patristics. In both cases the dangers to the purity of the

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<sup>75</sup> McGrath, *Historical Theology*, 182.

<sup>76</sup> George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 315-316.

<sup>77</sup> Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition*, 195.

church that prompted the Patristics to call upon unwritten oral traditions to combat the onslaught of heresy were heightened and left vulnerable. Martin Bucer provides a tangible example of the resurgence of the attitude the Patristics faced and fought. Bucer wanted to exalt and isolate Scripture so that it was separate from tradition altogether. His desire hearkened back to the battle fought at the Council of Nicea and those who promoted Arian theology. They called for the same approach to Scripture and tradition as Bucer. Both wanted to resort to strictly biblical language when speaking theologically.<sup>78</sup>

Bucer's desire captures the heart of the radical reformers who wanted a total break with the Roman Catholic Church and its "vices." They insisted on rejecting the authority and traditions of the papacy, which for them included all tradition and not just the distortions introduced during the Middle Ages. Many also called for a separation from the reformers who did not take their reformation efforts far enough, specifically the magisterial reformers. Whereas Luther and magisterial reformers sought to properly handle 1,500 years of church history, the radical reformers essentially wanted to throw it out, believing such was necessary for preserving the primacy of the New Testament Scripture.<sup>79</sup>

There is evidence that some radical reformers made use of the Patristics, but the usage is superficial. The usage of the Fathers is actually so minimal that it does more to support the radical reformers disregard of tradition than to show they made any kind of

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<sup>78</sup> George, *Theology of the Reformers*, 82.

<sup>79</sup> W. M. Patterson, *Baptist Successionism: A Critical View* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 15. J. D. Murch, *The Free Church: A Treatise on Church Polity with Special Relevance to Doctrine and Practice in Christian Churches and Churches of Christ* (Louisville, KY: Restoration Press, 1966), 36.



connection between the authority of the Fathers and the authority of Scripture.<sup>80</sup> When it comes to the Radical Reformer's view of Scripture and tradition's relationship, it can be said, "without hesitation that Scripture, through the inner working of the Spirit in the life of the believer, was the norm for faith."<sup>81</sup> However their minimal use of tradition reveals that "even those who disavow tradition are frequently affected by tradition, albeit in a somewhat different form."<sup>82</sup> Millard Erickson believes as long as the Fathers are viewed as commentaries on the text and not exalted to the place of biblical text then "they function as judicial authorities. Their authority comes from their utilization and elucidation of Scripture."<sup>83</sup> When kept in this perspective it can be a useful tool in the life of those who come from a Free Church background.

The Magisterial Reformer's understanding of the relationship between Scripture and tradition reveals that the chief doctrines of our faith have experienced many stages and levels of development. These stages reveal that "the Bible alone has never functioned as the sole means by which Christians are informed about their faith." There is a story woven through our two thousand-year history that reveals our connections to God and His work through His people. As we seek to understand the development of these doctrines, we unearth links between past and present that clarify our current interpretations of Scripture.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition*, 195-197.

<sup>81</sup> Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition*, 195-197.

<sup>82</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 284.

<sup>83</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 284.

<sup>84</sup> Williams, *Retrieving the Tradition*, 29.

## The Baptist Relationship with Tradition

Some argue that the beginnings of the Baptist movement date back further than the Reformation.<sup>85</sup> Few could argue with much force that the Baptist flag waves closest to those who were connected with the magisterial strand of the Reformation.<sup>86</sup> While there is much for which we are indebted to the Magisterial Reformers, according to Timothy George, “Our ecclesiology most closely approximates the Anabaptist ideal in its emphasis on the church as an intentional community composed of regenerated and baptized believers who are bound to one another and their Lord by a solemn covenant.”<sup>87</sup> The Anabaptists were and still are part of the radical wing of the Reformation. With this connection we must take the positive and the negative.

For centuries, Baptists have been associated with and identified by such words as *autonomous*, *dissenting*, and *separatist*. These descriptions have identified the churches that comprise the vast array of Baptists. Though some may see these descriptions as negative, Baptists wear them as a badge of honor. Baptists make up a major part of the Free Church movement, and as a result, have had a strong aversion to and emphasis upon resisting influences from outside forces upon the local church congregation. Central to this conviction is the belief that the individual local fellowships of the universal church

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<sup>85</sup> J. M. Carroll, *The Trail of Blood* (Lexington, KY: Ashland Avenue Baptist Church, 1931). Carroll includes a chart that traces the roots of Baptists all the back to Jesus’ organization of the church in Mark 3:16-18.

<sup>86</sup> Although, reform thought and theology has been present in Baptist history in England and America since the late sixteenth century, as can be seen in the life and ministry of Isaac Backus and many confessions of faith of the time period.

<sup>87</sup> Timothy George, “The Future of Baptist Theology,” in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 9.

should be “free from state power, political influence, or appointment by external leaderships.”<sup>88</sup> This freedom took several centuries to achieve and did not come easily for those in the Free Church movement. There has been a great deal of suffering and immense sacrifice, as well as literal blood, sweat, and tears, expended for the preservation and advance of the Free Church.

A study of the historical context in which the Baptist faith developed reveals that these convictions arose out of circumstances in which the church was intimately connected with civil government - a relationship that Baptists did not support or practice. These connections with civil government allowed the church to find much of its power and nature expressed through magisterial rule over parishioners and society. This rule was enforced by both civil and church authorities. There was often great overlap between the two. Sanctioned by the State, at various times and in various places, both Catholic and diverse Protestant groups have interfered in the affairs of Baptist and other Free Church fellowships. Baptists have held firm to what they believe are solidly biblical convictions that preserve Scripture’s authority and its practical applications manifested in beliefs like the spiritual nature of the church, in contrast to the magisterial nature that has often surrounded them. They have held firm this conviction in the face of persecution, oppression, rejection, and even martyrdom.

Baptists’ concern for the preservation of the spiritual nature of the church resulted in doctrinal concerns and convictions over such practices as believer’s baptism, membership in the church, and separation of church and state. Baptists continually turned to Scripture for their justification of their positions on these issues and felt others

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<sup>88</sup> Dr. Ergun Mehmet Caner, class notes, CHHI 694 “History of Baptists” taught at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, May 2005.

who held opposing views often allowed their understanding to be clouded by tradition. Baptist's contrary convictions on these issues caused them to carry out their ecclesiastical practices differently than their Reformation counterparts.

The heart of their conviction is a belief in the sufficiency of Scripture.<sup>89</sup> For Baptists this means that the primary means by which God leads His church is through the Word of God, which is sufficient. Since Scripture is sufficient, Baptists have seen little or no need for things such as tradition in the form of creeds and confessions. This has preserved the sufficiency of Scripture but has created a disconnect with our ecclesial past both in a macro and micro sense. Many denominations have stayed connected with their past through the use of creeds, confessions, and catechisms. They see these as providing a canvas upon which each generation can pass on to the next generation the orthodox doctrines of the faith as well as the history upon which these doctrines have been preserved and protected. If left unchecked, these tools of tradition can and occasionally have usurped Scripture's authority. So Baptists have not been willing to take that chance, having historically witnessed the abuses firsthand. They have rejected these tools, claiming all that is needed can be found within the pages of Scripture.

The anti-creedal sentiment that has run through Baptist history has become even more militaristic in our day for some. At the same time there is a cry for the use of creeds from other movements within Baptist circles. The danger for both is a lack of respect for and disconnect from Baptist history and heritage. Either way, Baptists must stay conscious of the roots of our Baptist understanding of Christian faith and stay true to

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<sup>89</sup> Though a belief in the sufficiency of Scripture has been a distinctive of Baptists since their inception, this belief has been disregarded by growing numbers of Baptists in the past century. Addressing the marginalization of Scripture by Baptists is outside the scope of this work, however, the challenge for Baptists to reconnect with their roots is one means in which the author seeks to offer a suggested step that can lead Baptists back to a proper understanding of the centrality of Scripture.

those roots while building upon them. We must not become so caught up in a method that the method becomes the focus at the expense of what it can deliver. One of the questions facing Baptists in this current discussion is whether it is possible to capture the benefits of what creeds, confessions, and a connection with tradition have to offer while not compromising our Baptist heritage and distinctives. Tom J. Nettles has wisely observed the importance of maintaining sensitivity to the concerns present within Baptists while presenting the way forward when he writes with regard to our history and other sensitive issues, “Stewardship of our spiritual heritage requires that...areas of concern be addressed with candor and seriousness, for they have not arisen in a vacuum.”<sup>90</sup> By carefully navigating this current debate we can maintain the positive results of our Baptist distinctives and minimize the negative.

For all the good that has resulted from what makes Baptists distinct from other denominations, there are negative results as well. No denomination is perfect, leaving room for growth and improvement for all in the body of Christ. One of the negative elements developing from Baptist distinctives is a sort of spiritual myopia. With little intentional connection to the past or intentional study of the past, it is difficult for the average Baptist to appreciate the past. When this is combined with the fact that most people do not appreciate the study of history, what we have is a spiritual nearsightedness where all we can see is that which is directly in front of us. Timothy George has rightly observed the need for “a Baptist retrieval of the Christian heritage as a source of renewal

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<sup>90</sup> Tom Nettles, “Are Creeds Appropriate for Bible Believing Baptists?” *Founder’s Journal*, issue 3, fall/winter 1990-91, [http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/journal/fj03/article2\\_fr.html](http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/journal/fj03/article2_fr.html) (accessed October 11, 2009).

for the life of the church today.”<sup>91</sup> Without this kind of retrieval we cannot hope for much more than shallow expressions of our evangelical Baptist faith.

One example of this shallow expression of our evangelical faith resulting from spiritual myopia is how many individuals understand tradition today. Oftentimes when tradition is brought up in a discussion among church going people, the understanding is limited to traditional expressions of corporate worship in contrast to contemporary or blended expressions. This is a shallow understanding of tradition. It is rooted in shallow ground that stretches back only decades rather than throughout the whole of church history. When Tradition is equated with merely pipe organs, particular attire, and programming on Sunday evenings it is no wonder the story has lost its deeply personal nature for young and old alike.

Sixteenth-century American Baptist pastor Isaac Backus stands as an example of one who wrestled to stay true to what it means to be Baptist and at the same time fully utilize the power of our faith story. Backus combined his Baptist convictions with his shepherd’s heart and his passion for history to deeply root the faith of his congregation. His life and work also had a lingering impact on the budding nation of America. He serves as a model of one who kept Scripture and tradition in healthy relationship that advanced the Baptist denomination and the kingdom of God. The impact of his story is still resonating far beyond his congregation in New England to the entire nation. It has the potential among Baptists to bring renewal in our congregations as we study and replicate the ways in which he retrieved Christian heritage, unlocking the power of our

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<sup>91</sup> Timothy George, “Is Jesus a Baptist?” in, *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future*, ed. David S. Dockery (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 89-104.

faith story in ways that were deeply relevant to addressing the issues he and the people of his time faced.

## CHAPTER 4

### BURIED TREASURE

...keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.  
-Philippians 3:17b ESV

I was a teenager when I discovered my Great-Grandma's attic. I knew it was there, but had been denied access until I entered adolescence. I will never forget the first time I ascended the steep narrow staircase. As I reached the summit of the steps, it was as if I entered a living time capsule. A bygone era enveloped me. The furniture, the wall hangings, the linens, even the dust and air had the feel that they were suspended in time. The discovery was more priceless than I could comprehend at my young age. Yet, I still spent hours soaking in the veritable treasure trove that surrounded me.

There was a time when it was popular for churches to leave time capsules for future generations. The process was meant to be meaningful and fun for those leaving the treasure and those finding it. The generation unearthing the capsule several decades or, perhaps, centuries, later were granted a peak into their past, connecting them to a bygone era through the contents inside. The contents were more than just pieces of nostalgia for those who carefully placed them; they were meant to provide inspiration and guidance from preceding generations.

Time capsules are intended to be found. However, there have been times when a capsule and its contents are lost in the changing landscape and subsequently forgotten. Such a thing happened in Lincoln, Nebraska, not long ago. A time capsule that had been buried in 1870 by the Congregational-United Church of Christ was forgotten until



stonemason Tom Stander uncovered it on February 16, 2010. Stander discovered the capsule while working to restore a part of the building that now houses Weeping Water Public Library.<sup>1</sup> Had it not been for the restoration project the time capsule may never have been found and the treasures within forever lost.

Time capsules are not the only buried links to our heritage that can be lost. We can just as easily forget about the people who have gone before us. And the results can be equally tragic as we lose the valuable lessons that can be gained from their stories.

### **A Forgotten Treasure, Isaac Backus**

For Baptists, the life and legacy of Isaac Backus is a buried time capsule waiting to be discovered. During the generation following the First Great Awakening, his ministry and influence were such that he has been considered one of the great spiritual leaders of Baptist history in America. However, in spite of his impact and influence in his own generation, little attention has been paid to him or to his ministry.<sup>2</sup> When attention has been given, it has largely been through the singular lens of his work for religious liberty and the separation of church and state.

Yet, Isaac Backus' ministry spanned the formative years for the Baptist movement in America and he did much to lead through those years. During the

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<sup>1</sup> Algis J. Laukaitis, "Church Time Capsule Dating to 1870 Discovered in Weeping Water," *JournalStar.com*, March 1, 2010, Nebraska News, [http://journalstar.com/news/state-and-regional/nebraska/article\\_2bbf40b0-2587-11df-b040-001cc4c002e0.html](http://journalstar.com/news/state-and-regional/nebraska/article_2bbf40b0-2587-11df-b040-001cc4c002e0.html) (accessed September 15, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Isaac Backus' influence can still be felt throughout the United States today. His contribution to the cause of religious freedom still reverberates throughout the United States political system as it also does within Baptist churches. His voice for religious freedom is one of the reasons Baptist churches are able to worship freely in this country, to remain autonomous in their governance, and to compensate their pastoral staff without paying the salary of another pastor of a state-approved church through heavy taxation. Yet, his work for these things is largely unknown to Baptists today.

eighteenth century there was arguably no more significant Baptist personality. Some historians believe he is so critical to this time in Baptist history that they have labeled him “the father of American Baptists.”<sup>3</sup> Historian Mark Noll wrote that he is “the key figure in the rise of the Baptist denomination in New England.”<sup>4</sup>

A study of Isaac Backus and the time in which he lived reveals the many ways he served as a key figure for Baptists. He served as a bridge that brought together, into one denomination, old and new Baptists who differed theologically.<sup>5</sup> He helped Baptists gain respect among other denominations in America. He also gained equality for Baptists among other denominations and advanced Baptist thought among Protestant intellectuals, as he heralded the theological thought of the budding denomination during its fragile establishment stage.<sup>6</sup>

Isaac Backus sought to bring about renewal and revival in a variety of ways during his lifetime. These were distinct and at the same time interconnected. Backus utilized his pastoral ministry as a primary means of accomplishing this goal. He faithfully ministered in the same area for his entire career.<sup>7</sup> Backus saw his work as a

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<sup>3</sup> Mary Hewitt Mitchell, *The Great Awakening and Other Revivals in the Religious Life of Connecticut* (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1934).

<sup>4</sup> Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 149.

<sup>5</sup> William G. McLoughlin, Introduction, in *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism: Pamphlets, 1754-1789* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1968). McLoughlin has observed that “Backus’ New Light theology was a bridge between Edwards and Finney.” (59).

<sup>6</sup> Stanley Grenz, *Isaac Backus – Puritan and Baptist* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1983), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Backus began his pastorate at the Titicut Separate church in early 1748. Titicut was between the townships of Bridgewater and Middleboro. The parish was without a pastor for nearly five years and full of strife. Backus faithfully served as pastor until January 1756 when the church folded due in part to Backus’ changing doctrinal convictions concerning infant baptism and his failed attempts at maintaining an open-communion church. Backus then formed the closed-communion First Baptist Church in nearby Middleboro with 6 charter members. He remained pastor at Middleboro until his death in 1806.

historian as another means of spiritual renewal. He painstakingly and meticulously researched history and then shared his findings in ways that were accessible to people across the intellectual spectrum. Backus' significant work as an activist for the establishment of religious liberty served as an additional means of inspiring revival. We continue to enjoy the fruit of his work in this area every time we gather to freely worship God.

Each of these categories is significant in it's own right, but each is not meant to receive equal weight in Backus' life, nor should they in our efforts to understand him. Backus' struggle for religious liberty in New England during the Revolutionary period arose from his pastor's heart. He was a pastor first, and his work for religious liberty and history was a result of his passion for shepherding his congregations in Titicut and later, Middleboro. His stand for religious liberty was rooted in his theological position, which he developed through his ongoing wrestling with the Word of God.<sup>8</sup> He wanted to provide people with the right to worship as they wished and where they wished. He wanted to correct the error that had worked its way into society in which the institutions of church and state took precedence over the priority of the individual. He also sought to provide pastors with income from their own churches without their parishioners being forced to pay taxes for the pastor of the Standing Order church in the area. His study of history and his essays were meant to call the churches of New England back to the model

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<sup>8</sup> Milton Vaughn Backman, Jr. was the first to present this theory in his unpublished PhD. dissertation "Isaac Backus: A Pioneer Champion of Religious Liberty," (PhD. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1959). Stanley Grenz agreed and further develops the thesis in his work *Isaac Backus – Puritan and Baptist*. In this work, Grenz observes that William McLoughlin also did a limited amount of work to develop this thesis through the research of three tracts published by Isaac Backus prior to 1768.

and purity found in the church of the first century.<sup>9</sup> The ideals he put forth were meant to advance the reformation that had begun with Luther and Calvin and later the English Puritans and Separatists, but subsequently abandoned as they lost their way striving to maintain their ideal of a “city on a hill.” So whether it was pastoring, advocating for religious liberty, or conveying history, Backus was working to call for the church to return to the path of reformation that had led her to the New World.

Keenly aware of the turbulent mood of his times, Backus possessed a knack for taking the resources at his disposal, perceiving them through the lens of his commitment to God’s truth as he saw it, then interpreting it in ways that provided direction for friends and enemies alike. He was determined to be a catalyst for change, change he believed would result in spiritual revival and reform in New England, which in turn would spread throughout the world.

What we stand to gain through studying the life and ministry of Isaac Backus is buried treasure full of wisdom and inspiration. Isaac Backus provides a tangible model to emulate for the Baptist who desires to reconnect with our history in a way that maintains biblical and Baptist integrity.

### **Shaping Influences in the Life of Isaac Backus**

The impact Isaac Backus had later in life was largely shaped by his early years. His development was influenced by the culture, relationships, and backgrounds that surrounded him. Several influences are noteworthy in examining the legacy of Isaac Backus. These are the things, ideas, and people that shaped the man.

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<sup>9</sup> Backman, Jr, “Isaac Backus,” 151.

One of the factors that colored Isaac Backus' worldview was his family's place in the social stratus of New England society. The Backus family enjoyed a privileged place in society as part of the elite ruling class of Connecticut's societal structure. His great-great grandfather, William Backus Sr., was one of the original proprietors of the town of Norwich in 1659. His great-grandfather, William Backus, Jr. was also one of the early settlers of Norwich. He received a large share of land that became the basis of the family fortune. Through the years the family continued to accumulate additional land. In addition to their landholdings, the family owned a blacksmith shop, an ironworks, a sawmill, a gristmill, and a general store. Other elite and influential families from the region inter-married with the Backus family, thereby increasing their wealth and prominence even more.<sup>10</sup>

Along with this wealth and importance came appointments to offices within the town. Isaac Backus had family members who were pastors in the Standing Order and others who served in various positions in the government of the Colonies. His grandfather, Joseph, not only served on the Connecticut legislature but also served as Justice of the Peace. As Judge, he was entitled to punish those who disturbed the peace, and he used this power liberally against those who dissented against the Standing Order.<sup>11</sup> Isaac Backus' father, Samuel, was a wealthy farmer and served several terms in the

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<sup>10</sup> Isaac Backus' lineage can also be traced to the Mayflower. "Backus was a direct descendent of Edward Winslow of the Mayflower pilgrims. Winslow has been called one of the founders of the Plymouth Colony. It was Winslow, sent by Governor Bradford, who first visited Chief Massasoit and developed a friendly relationship among the Native Americans of the area. Winslow would go on to serve three terms as Governor of the Colony." 1<sup>st</sup> Baptist Church North Middleboro. MA website, [http://www.fbcnm.org/#!\\_\\_about-us/history](http://www.fbcnm.org/#!__about-us/history) (accessed November 1, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> It is likely that Isaac Backus' grandfather helped school Isaac in the principles of civil liberty. The education may have been more informal through family stories but what would have been conveyed was a view of civil liberty that was strongly against dissenters and strongly for the independence of the local church.

General Assembly.<sup>12</sup> By the time Isaac Backus was born the family had enjoyed several generations of privilege and influence within New England society.

The central place of religion in individual and public life during the eighteenth century in New England was also a prominent influence on Isaac Backus. He “lived at a time when religious issues raised the question of where the true source of spiritual authority lay, whether in the church or in the individual conscience.”<sup>13</sup> He lived in a place and time in which religion and church association were an integral part of community life. Those living in colonial America, especially the Northern colonies, were concerned with creating a new religious community, a redeemed society that was a “city on a hill.” Many of those who traveled to the New World did so with the express primary purpose of seeing this vision become a practical reality. Their belief was that when this ideal became reality, it would stand as a model for the rest of the world.<sup>14</sup> George Marsden has written of the colonies, “The New England colonies represented one of the

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<sup>12</sup> William G. McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus and the American Pietistic Tradition* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), 2-4.

<sup>13</sup> McLoughlin, *the American Pietistic Tradition*, vi.

<sup>14</sup> This idealistic view was carried across the Atlantic by the Massachusetts Bay Company and was rooted in John Calvin’s theology and his vision for Geneva. The Puritans looked to Calvin’s Geneva for a model society. “For them, God’s laws were explicitly stated in the Bible, and these demanded obedience not only by the individual Christian but by society as a whole as well. This obedience could be brought about only if the Christian community would take the lead in shaping and regulating society, which being in a fallen state was only in this way salvageable. Hence, just as in Old Testament Israel, the state was to have a role to play in the Christian nation, but not that of controlling the church or subordinating the church to itself, as in Lutheranism and in Erastian England. Rather, the church was to be independent, with the civil sphere doing its part merely by acknowledging and advancing the true religion.” However, the Puritans differed on a few points with Calvin’s view of church and society and thereby “desired to attempt what Calvin relegated to the impossible, the gathering of pure churches containing only the elect of God.” Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 17–18.

best hopes for building a spiritual-political base that might provide at least a model, perhaps even a staging center, for the coming revival.”<sup>15</sup>

The prevalent influence of religion adversely served to create widespread apathy among the colonists in New England instead of the vibrant faith the settlers originally envisioned. This too was a shaping influence for Isaac Backus. During this crucial period of a little over a hundred years in New England, the religious and social experiment had been struggling to develop. Religion significantly impacted every aspect of life and culture for those in New England. Deep religious roots fostered a strong desire in many to be a covenant community. In spite of this, a lax attitude had developed regarding personal piety. Backus lived in the midst of this attitude throughout most of his youth. At the beginning of his personal journal he gives testimony to this writing, “I Lived a Careless and Secure Life for more than 17 years though in all this time I did never think that I was Converted but flattered my Self with this that I would turn by and by.”<sup>16</sup> In spite of the fact that Backus’ parents sought to raise him and his siblings “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and educated [them] well in Christian doctrine,”<sup>17</sup> he still grew up apathetic toward his spiritual condition.

Backus’ apathy concerning his spiritual condition may also be attributed to the fact that throughout most of Backus’ formative years, his family was about as religious as the average family in New England during this time. Though religion was a major factor

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<sup>15</sup> George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 149.

<sup>16</sup> Isaac Backus, *The Diary of Isaac Backus: Volume I: “1741 – 1764,”* ed. William G. McLoughlin (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1979), 3. All quotes from Isaac Backus preserve the original spelling and capitalization.

<sup>17</sup> McLoughlin, Introduction of *Diary: Volume I*, xvi.

in day-to-day life it was often empty. He and his siblings were baptized as infants and educated in Christian doctrine through *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, which was taught at the schoolhouse as part of the regular school curriculum. In addition, the parish pastor regularly visited the school and catechized the children, also as part of the curriculum. On Sundays, the Backus family regularly attended the parish church. It was an all day affair in Puritan New England consisting of lengthy prayers and multiple messages. All of this did little to spark Backus' concern for his soul. He wrote in his diary in 1751, "Although I was often warned and Exorted, (especially by my godly mother) to fly from the Wrath to come: - yet I Never was under any Powerful Conviction 'Til the year 1741."<sup>18</sup>

When the embers of conversion finally did begin to burn in his life, Backus embraced his family's roots in New England Congregationalism that adopted the *Cambridge Platform*.<sup>19</sup> These roots were deeply entrenched in the family. For example, when some Congregationalists, in response to an appeal from the Connecticut General Court, presented the *Saybrook Platform*,<sup>20</sup> Isaac Backus' grandfather, Joseph Backus,

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<sup>18</sup> Isaac Backus, "Isaac Backus His Writeing Containing Some Particular Account of My Conversion," In, Isaac Backus, *The Diary of Isaac Backus: Volume III: "1786 – 1806,"* ed. William G. McLoughlin (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1979), Appendix 1, 1523.

<sup>19</sup> New England Congregationalism believed that individual churches should consist of committed Christians and their children. These congregations should be free from any external secular or clerical authority. The power rested in the individual congregation rather than with a church hierarchy. Individual churches were free to choose their own minister and exercise church discipline. When Congregationalists came to New England, they saw an opportunity to develop a model of a truly competent state religion that blossomed from the one true religion, Congregationalism. They believed that the New World would serve as the example that Congregationalism "when patronized by the godly magistrate, could remold society and bring about the uniformity which had been the goal of the reformers." Their desire was not to separate church and state but to subordinate the state to the church in order that society would be governed biblically which, they believed, would best bring about the good of humankind and the glory of God. Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 13-61.

<sup>20</sup> The *Saybrook Platform* was an attempt by some Connecticut Congregationalists to strengthen church government. Four laymen and twelve ministers met in Saybrook, Connecticut, at the response of the Connecticut General Court and drafted fifteen articles related to administering church discipline. The



rejected it. The drift toward a greater Presbyterian form of governance that interfered with the autonomy of the congregation, severely limiting the independence of the local parish, did not settle well with him. So when the pastor of the church he attended in Norwich, Connecticut, accepted the changes, Joseph Backus withdrew from the congregation. Placing his religious convictions ahead of his political status cost him his position in the Connecticut legislature for a short time. He did not return to the congregation until the pastor who accepted the *Saybrook Platform* resigned and a pastor who accepted the *Cambridge Platform* was installed.<sup>21</sup>

Like many New Englanders, Isaac Backus' life was significantly reshaped when the First Great Awakening spread across the New England landscape with the arrival of George Whitefield. The Awakening deeply impacted Backus' life through conversion. It served as a great shaping influence for his theology as well. Because he was only sixteen when the Awakening broke out he was able to be a significant participant and leader in the outworking of this theology throughout the remainder of his life. The context in

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*Platform* adjusted the *Westminster Confession* and also included Presbyterian features of church governance. The ministers within county regions were given authority to intervene and judge disputes within local churches. A colony wide general association was also created. For full text of the *Saybrook Platform* see, Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Texts of Congregationalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1893), 502-506.  
<http://books.google.com/books?id=Vv4QAAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=creeds+platforms+congregationalism&cd=1#v=onepage&q&f=false> (accessed September 27, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Six years before Isaac Backus' birth, his father Samuel and mother Elizabeth became members of this church in Norwich by way of the Halfway Covenant and remained there through the early years of his life. Alvah Hovey, *A Memoir of the Life and Times of the Rev. Isaac Backus, A. M. 1859*, Reprint (Ann Arbor, MI: Scholarly Publishing Office, University of Michigan, 2009), 20-26. See also, McLoughlin, *American Pietistic Tradition*, 5. The Halfway Covenant was the New England Puritan's effort to preserve the Christian commonwealth by allowing children of those who had experienced infant baptism but had not followed that with a public profession of faith to have their children baptized as a seal of God's covenanting grace. This membership meant they could not participate in the Lord's Supper or experience any of the other privileges of church membership until they made a public profession of their own faith. This kept many more people under the influence of the church without compromising the close relationship between church and society that allowed only those who had publicly professed a saving conversion by God to vote and govern.

which this theology worked out was one of trauma, conflict, and controversy. These were the years that saw the Colonies declare and win their freedom from England, establishing a new nation. These were also the years that the Standing Order's firm grasp of New England was being challenged by those who sought freedom and liberty to worship as they chose.<sup>22</sup>

Through all these experiences and influences the primary spiritual influence in Isaac Backus' life was his mother. His father died in 1740 only four years after making a profession of faith. Isaac Backus' profession of faith came in 1741, one year after his father's death. Within the writings of Backus there is no description of his father's spiritual influence in his life. History provides us with little other spiritual information than the record of his conversion.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand, there is much material in the writings of Isaac Backus and the correspondence with his mother that reveals her spiritual influence in his life.<sup>24</sup> Her spiritual influence intensified as she faced the unexpected loss of her husband at the onset of the First Great Awakening.

The First Great Awakening swept through New England beginning in the fall of 1740. Around the same time in November 1740, Isaac Backus' father died suddenly and unexpectedly. Isaac Backus' mother slumped into depression at the loss of her husband. She remained in that state until the summer of 1741. During that summer the parish pastor, Benjamin Lord, invited James Davenport, one of George Whitefield's protégés to

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<sup>22</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 63.

<sup>23</sup> Hovey, *A Memoir*, 26.

<sup>24</sup> Isaac Backus, "Isaac Backus Materials 1723 – 1789, microfilm Publication 424," (Nashville, TN: Historical Commission, Southern Baptist Convention, 1959). Miscellaneous letters from Elizabeth Backus to Isaac Backus.

come preach in Norwich.<sup>25</sup> Backus' mother was among the many who were converted and renewed by the ministry of Davenport.<sup>26</sup> As a result, her depression lifted and she opened her home regularly for prayer and exhortation. Her spiritual passion was ignited and did not waver from that time forward. She wrote of her condition "I could not be willing to be again in that sleepy state of soul towards God...no, not to be in the most prosperous condition in temporal things that ever I was in, all my life."<sup>27</sup> Her spiritual nourishment became the delight of her life. She wrote of it, "Now I can say, I hunger and thirst after the Word, it is the delight of my soul."<sup>28</sup> Isaac Backus wrote of his mother after this time, "I believe very few have lived with more constant devotedness to God than she has ever since."<sup>29</sup>

Upon witnessing what was happening in his mother's life and the lives of so many others in Norwich, Isaac Backus' concern for the state of his soul was awakened. At last, he desired a conversion experience like those he witnessed taking place in so many around him. On the twenty-fourth day of August 1741, Backus received the conversion experience for which he sought. He recorded it accordingly, "blessed be God he did not leave me here but he laid open to me the fountain of Sin that was in my heart that I Saw

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<sup>25</sup> George Whitefield never preached in Norwich.

<sup>26</sup> Backus records his mother's conversion having taken place about 1721. It was something he says she mentioned regularly to her children. Isaac Backus, *Gospel Comfort, Under Heavy Tidings: The Substance of a Sermon Delivered At Middleborough, February 5, 1769, Upon Hearing of the Death of a Godly Mother. By Isaac Backus, Pastor of a Church There. To Which Is Added, Some Memories of Her Life* (Providence, RI: Printed by John Carter, at Shakespear's Head, 1769).

<sup>27</sup> Elizabeth Backus, personal correspondence as quoted in, Hovey, *A Memoir*, 27-28. Also see, Isaac Backus, "Isaac Backus Materials 1723 – 1789."

<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Backus, personal correspondence as quoted in, Hovey, *A Memoir*, 27-28. Hovey includes several excerpts from correspondence that Elizabeth sent to her son which reveal the resolute passion of her faith and her sweet encouragement of her son in his faith and ministry. See pages 27-30.

<sup>29</sup> Backus, *Gospel Comfort*. 17.

that all the Sins in the whole world were in me and...he brought the Commandment home.”<sup>30</sup>

The Great Awakening’s influence on the Backus family resulted in them embracing New Light<sup>31</sup> Congregationalism. Shortly after his conversion Isaac Backus wanted to connect with a church but was hesitant to join the Norwich church because of a concern about the laxity with which Reverend Benjamin Lord accepted members. Backus’ reluctance was rooted in his New Light convictions. He was concerned that there was no account of a change of heart in those being received as members. He wrote, “I never knew an instance in my day, of any who were admitted into any of [the Standing

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<sup>30</sup> Backus, *Diary Volume I*, 3. This account at the beginning of his diary is an abbreviated retelling of his conversion experience. He gives a more detailed account in 1751 which is recorded as Appendix 1 in his diary. There he records, “Not Long after this on August the 24, 1741 as I was mowing in the field alone I was thinking of my case; and all my past Life Seemed to be brought fresh to my view And it appeared indeed nothing but a life of Sin. I felt so that I left work and went and sat Down under a Shadey tree; and I was brought to Look Particularly into my duties and striveings How I had tryed to get help by awakening Preaching but found it fail. Had tryed to Men my Self by my Tears prayers and Promises of doing better but all in vain – my heart was Hard and full of Corruption still. And it Appeared clear to me then that I had tryed Every way that Possibly I Could and if I perished Forever I Could do no more. And the Justice of God Shined so clear Before my eyes Condemning Such a guilty Rebel that I Could say no more – but fell at his feet. I See that I was in his hands and he had a right To do with me just as he Pleased And I Lay like a Dead Vile Creature before him. I felt a calm in my mind – them tossings And tumults that I felt before seemed to be gone. And Just in that Critical moment God who caused the light to Shine out of Darkness, Shined into my heart with such A discovery of that glorious Righteousness Which fully Satesfies the Law that I had Broken; and of the Infinite Fullness that there Is in Christ to Satesfie the wants of just Such a helpless Creature as I was and these Blessings Were held forth So freely to my Soul – That my Whole Heart was attracted and Drawn away after God and Swallowed up with Admiration in viewing his Divine glories. Never did his Word appear So before as It did now: - it appeared So glorious and Such Infallible Truth that I could with the greatest Freedom Rest my Eternal all upon what God hath Spoken. Now the way of Salvation appeared so excellent and glorious That I Wondered that I had stood out So long against Such a Blessed Redeemer. Yea I wondered that all the World didn’t Come to him. And now my Burden (that was so dreadful Heavey before) was gone: that tormenting fear That I has was taken away and I felt a Sweet Peace and rejoicing in my soul. But yet all This time I hadn’t one thought that this was That Which is Called Conversion; it was so Different from the notion that I had of it before.” Backus, *Diary, Volume III*, 1525 – 1526.

<sup>31</sup> New Lights were contrasted with Old Lights during this time in New England. New Lights grew out of the Great Awakening and the teaching of William and Gilbert Tennent stressing the experiential aspect of the Christian life. Both sides professed Calvinist theology though the New Lights stressed Puritan piety as a critical element of Calvinist theology. They believed that a true conversion experience lead to moral obedience and personal holiness. Old Lights stressed that orthodox theology was the practical sign of salvation rather than the manner of the converts practical life.

Order] churches by declaring *personally the faith wrought in their souls*; and a great part of them have now dropped even giving *written relations*.”<sup>32</sup> Eventually Backus did join with the Norwich church but only for a short time. He and other New Lights within the congregation became increasingly concerned with Reverend Lord’s Old Light rejection of the results of the Great Awakening. The New Lights in the congregation, including Backus, chose to separate and hold their own meetings. Their separation was not looked upon favorably by the church. At a meeting of the Norwich church those who separated were given an opportunity to share their justification for separating.<sup>33</sup> Their reasoning was found insufficient, and they were warned of their error and admonished to return to the church. The group never did return and instead organized a Separate Congregational church in Norwich on July 16, 1746.

These shaping influences can be seen running like threads through the remainder of Isaac Backus’ life work. They are interwoven in his work as a pastor, historian, and activist for the separation of church and state. Primary in those pursuits was his call to pastoral ministry.

### **The Pursuit of Pastoring**

At the point of the establishment of the Separate church in Norwich, Backus had not yet received a call to ministry. This experience came two months later. Backus struggled with doubt in the course of accepting his call to ministry. At every objection he

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<sup>32</sup> Isaac Backus, “*A Fish Caught in His Own Net*,” in Backus, *On Church, State*, 186.

<sup>33</sup> Those who chose to separate from the church in Norwich did so based on four issues: “1) Neglect of church discipline, and coldness and want of application in preaching. 2) Lack of adherence to the gospel qualifications of church membership. 3) Laity prohibited from exhortation and prayer. 4) Acceptance of Saybrook Platform and new anti-Awakening laws.” Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 68.

conceived, the Lord met him with Scripture to negate his protests. He described this exchange in his diary entry on September 27, 1746: “when I ‘waked in the morning, the hand of the Lord was powerfully upon me; and that day he gave me Some Clear views, of the State of his people, and also renewedly opned the treasures of the gospel; and Commanded me to go and feed his People in his name.” In spite of this encouragement from the Lord his response was one of doubt. He continues, “But I found great Struglings against it: and made many Excuses.”<sup>34</sup>

The manner in which Backus received his call to ministry was consistent with His New Light convictions. His was an internal call which New Lights considered more significant than the Old Light’s emphasis upon earned degrees for preaching. Backus immediately tested and confirmed his call by preaching the following Sunday in the Separate church at Norwich. The congregation confirmed his call and he set out on the itinerant circuit for the next year.

In December 1747 Isaac Backus began his relationship with the Separate parish in Titicut, Massachusetts. After spending nearly a year traveling from church to church to preach, God was opening a door for him to settle in and pastor a local congregation. By February he had written articles of faith and a church covenant. Sixteen individuals, including Backus himself, accepted and signed these documents on February 16. The church grew to thirty-four members by March 31, at which point the church unanimously called Backus to become their pastor. His ordination as minister of a Separate church followed on April 13. This ordination was in the manner the New Lights advanced. Rather than looking for the endorsement of the consociation, Isaac Backus’ ordination

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<sup>34</sup> Backus, *Diary, Volume I*, 4. See also, Hovey, *A Memoir*, 6, for an additional account written by Isaac Backus of his call to ministry.

was performed by the local congregation he would pastor. This created additional separation between him and the Standing Order pastors in the area.

Neither the presence of this Separate church nor Isaac Backus' installment as pastor, were received favorably by the area parish. The Precinct Committee that had initially extended an invitation to Isaac Backus revoked that invitation at the beginning of March 1748, realizing his New Light leanings. Backus wrote of the experience, "They never offered me a farthing for my preaching two months at their request. .... Directly afterwards they called a precinct meeting and taxed me five pounds."<sup>35</sup> At the same time the members of the Separate church were being taxed heavily to build a meeting house they would not be using. Backus refused payment of his tax, as did his parishioners. He and the church sought exemption from the religious tax but were flatly rejected. Many experienced imprisonment when the civil government stepped in. Backus escaped imprisonment only because someone paid the tax for him.

This was the beginning of Isaac Backus' efforts to secure religious freedom. It all began with a desire to "gain for themselves the same exemption status currently enjoyed by the Baptists, Quakers, and Anglicans."<sup>36</sup> This issue that became so central to the life of Isaac Backus was deeply rooted in two desires: To pastor his congregation as a faithful shepherd who protected his flock, and to stand upon what he firmly believed were the truly biblical historic convictions of Christianity.

At nearly the same time, Backus began to struggle with the issue of infant baptism. It was not until 1756 that he made the move to unite with Baptists in America.

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<sup>35</sup> Isaac Backus, personal correspondence, quoted in Hovey, *A Memoir*, 70.

<sup>36</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 70.

At that time he established the Baptist church in Middleboro, Massachusetts. However, his journey began seven years earlier in August 1749 when Ebenezer Hinds and Jonathan Woods, members of Titicut Separate Church, rejected infant baptism and challenged Backus' theology on the issue. Backus initially set out to refute their claims but ultimately found himself agreeing with their position. In his diary Backus records the following on Sunday, August 13, "Last week to add to our other trials there was Brought into the Church a dispute Concerning Baptism, which made considerable Contention and this together With other trial did almost overwhelm me, but God, who Comforteth them that are cast down did Support me."<sup>37</sup> This became a back and forth issue for Backus for several years before he found a clear resolution from his study of Scripture and supplemental study of history. A subsequent entry in his diary on August 28 reveals the ongoing struggle he faced:

The disputes Concerning Baptism increased Sometime, till at last I began to be of that mind too. Especially on Saterday night Aug. 26 while I was crying to God for help and direction; I found that there were many things that were very dear to me that yet I Could freely give up into the hands of God: but when I came to this point I found a pulling back: then presently Came in a Conclusion that, that principle was right, because I felt Such a Strugling against it, and then the next day it was So much pressed upon my mind that I Preaching upon it in the afternoon – that none had any right to baptism but Believers, and that plunging, Seemed the only right mode. But before I had done I felt my mind entangled, and an awful glowm followed for twenty four hours; but some relief was granted afterwards, and my mind was turned back to infant baptism.<sup>38</sup>

This arduous journey reveals a principle that is evident throughout Backus' life and ministry. He first studied and pored over the Word of God for answers, practicing a distinctive of the Baptist denomination even before he professed a connection with

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<sup>37</sup> Backus, *Diary*, volume I, 66-67.

<sup>38</sup> Backus, *Diary*, volume I, 66-68.



Baptists. He diligently studied the Scriptures for evidence supporting the practice of infant baptism.<sup>39</sup> Though an avid historian, Backus recognized the primacy of Scripture and turned there first for issues such as this.<sup>40</sup>

He gave himself just as diligently to the meticulous study of Scripture as he did historic documents. As he studied the Scriptures, he was unable to find any evidence for infant baptism. Later in his life he wrote the following about his study of Scripture concerning infant baptism, “I found nothing like it in the scriptures, yet old traditions, and present corruptions on every side caused such darkness in my own mind, that it was a long time before I could obtain clearness about baptism.”<sup>41</sup> At this point Backus turned to Baptist history and the claims of Baptist scholars in England.<sup>42</sup> Through this study of both Scripture and history, Backus became convinced of the sound nature of Baptist distinctives concerning baptism.<sup>43</sup> In the minutes of the Titicut Separate Church, Backus recorded the following concerning his acceptance of antipedobaptism, “Att a Church

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<sup>39</sup> Hovey, *A Memoir*, 91. Hovey records that after two years of wrestling back and forth with the issue of the mode of baptism Backus set aside a day of fasting and prayer in which he took Wilson’s Scripture Manual and “seriously examined every particular passage of God’s Word which relates to baptism.”

<sup>40</sup> There were times when Backus did succumb to the experiential and experimental dynamics that were part of the Awakening which was influenced by pietism. In his first tract Backus writes of his desire to defend his internal call to ministry against the Standing Order’s criteria for ministerial service that “it has put me upon a more close examination of the Scriptures, and to look more critically into the nature of these things (for much of what I have here written I knew experimentally before I did doctrinally.” Backus, “An Internal Call,” 73. McLoughlin asserts, “His reliance on revelation was secondary to his direct personal perception of divine truth.” McLoughlin, Introduction, *Church, State*, 28. This was not always the case for Backus; however, it does occasionally show up in his work.

<sup>41</sup> Isaac Backus, “An Account of the Life of Isaac Backus,” quoted in, Backus, *Diary Volume I*: 75.

<sup>42</sup> Isaac Backus, *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists, Volume I*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. repr. (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Newton, MA: Backus Historical Society, 1871) 127-128, 145-155.

<sup>43</sup> McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus*, 61-63.

meeting Thursday, July 25, 1751, I told the Church that I was more fully Convinced That there wasn't Scripture grounds for Infant Baptism."<sup>44</sup> He followed up this declaration with his baptism by immersion on August 22, 1751.<sup>45</sup>

The implications of Backus' rejection of infant baptism were profound and he was likely aware of the implications of following through with this conviction. They were likely a factor in his going back and forth over the issue. Rejecting infant baptism went against the doctrines he was raised to believe, doctrines he had embraced throughout his life. However, he was not the only Separatist who was struggling with this issue following the Great Awakening.<sup>46</sup> As more Separatists struggled, the crisis within the denomination grew. Backus tried to navigate this crisis in his own life, in the church, and in his congregation by seeking unity. He remained at the church in Titicut and practiced open-communion.<sup>47</sup> Ultimately he recognized that the distance between accepting and rejecting infant baptism was too wide. He did not desire a separation and dissolution of the church, but the situation continued to deteriorate. It was only when it became clear

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<sup>44</sup> Backus, *Diary Volume I*, 143.

<sup>45</sup> His diary entry for August 22 reveals his wrestlings with this but the subsequent comfort of God. "Brother Benjamin Pierce Pastor of a Church in part of Warwick Preached among us at Brother Hindses this Day with Considerable Power; and then in the Afternoon Concluded to Baptize Some Persons. Now in the morning I had Thoughts of going to a meeting at Norton Today but Providence Seemed to shut up The way; So I went to this meeting; and tho' I felt dreadful Struggles in my mind About many things in the morning – Yet I had Sweet Refreshings under his preaching. And when I Came to see him Baptize Sundry persons, I haveing been convinced before that the Way that I used to go on in, In Baptizing Infants and by Sprinkling was not according to Scripture – and haveing this oppertunity to Practice as I now believed Was right – I darn't put it off. Therefore I told Some account of my Conversion and Then of my experiences as to these Things, which gave Satesfaction; then I went down Into the Water with him And was Baptized. And both then and Afterwards in the evening I felt a sweet Calmness of mind and some things opened with Special clearness to my Soul. Blessed be God." Backus, *Diary, Volume I*, 147-148.

<sup>46</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 71.

<sup>47</sup> Open-communion does not restrict participation in the Lord's supper to those who have been baptized by immersion. Closed-communion restricts participation in the Lord's supper only to those who have been baptized by immersion.

that the congregation could not stay together that Backus moved forward with closing down the Titicut Separate church. On January 16, 1756, he held a ceremony that marked the end of the Titicut Separate Church and the beginning of the First Baptist Church of Middleboro. In a letter to his mother ten days later Backus wrote, "I am convinced that it is neither agreeable nor expedient for those who differ so widely about the first ordinance of the gospel as we do, to build together, or in ordinary cases, to try to go on together in the special ordinances of the church."<sup>48</sup>

Critical to Backus' approach to issues he faced as a pastor whether doctrinal or otherwise was a great measure of humility. Backus was primarily persuaded by what he found in the study of Scripture rather than what was presented by men. He had respect for Scripture and its authority, and he coupled this with a humble spirit when studying the Bible. He was not afraid to share openly with his church when inconsistencies between personally held convictions and the Bible's teaching confronted him. Infant baptism provides an example. After preaching on August 27, 1749, to the church in Titicut that he was persuaded that believer's baptism was the biblical method, he changed his mind within 24 hours. Within a month he issued an apology to his church.<sup>49</sup> In February of the following year he wrote another apology for changing his principles of baptism that was followed four months later with an acknowledgement that he still was not completely resolved on the issue.<sup>50</sup> Three years later as he reflected upon his approach to publicly

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<sup>48</sup> Hovey, *A Memoir*, 117.

<sup>49</sup> Backus, *Diary, volume I*, 68-72. A full confession followed one month later at a church meeting on Tuesday, September 26. Backus recorded the occurrence in "Things relating to the Baptis," as follows, "I made a Confession and retraction for that Sermon that I preached to the Conterary."

<sup>50</sup> Isaac Backus, "Some Apology for my Changing my Principales Concerning Baptism," in *The Diary of Isaac Backus Volume III: 1786-1806*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1979), 1540-1541.

presenting his views to the church, Backus wrote, “Though I really thought that way to be right, yet those expressions which I delivered publicly, concerning venturing into eternity on that practice, did carry in them a much greater certainty than I really had at the time in my own soul, which has often since caused me to mourn before the Lord.”<sup>51</sup>

This humility combined with the steadfastness revealed in his firm grasp of convictions once he could ground them in the Bible reveals a man of meekness. These qualities remained with him through the decades he pastored at First Baptist Middleboro. In the midst of his battles for religious liberty and his laborious historic study, he never wavered as a pastor, bringing all these elements together to restore the church to its primitive purity.

### **The Pursuit of History**

Isaac Backus used history in ways that capitalized on its relevance to the issues facing his generation. History was not just a side interest for him. He was a Baptist pastor who embraced and utilized the power of historical study to bring about the renewal and revival he desired within his own local congregation. He saw it as a vital tool in the accomplishment of his desire to motivate life change and spark reformation.

Backus was interested in the usefulness of history for the practical spiritual development of those he pastored. One church historian has written that “Backus shared the common furniture of the New England Mind – a sense of the special purposes of the over-arching providence of God in bringing those puritan colonies into existence.” He continues, “Backus was no arm-chair historian: his was crusading history, passionate

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<sup>51</sup> Hovey, *A Memoir*, 87.

history, a record of past events made by a man whose eyes were firmly fixed on the necessity for setting that record straight for the sake of the future.”<sup>52</sup> Much of Backus’ framework for ministry was strongly rooted in his own recognition of his debt to history. As a result, he worked diligently to provide a historical record for the sake of the future.

Upon taking the First Baptist Church in Middleboro, the rest of his life was spent as a Baptist, but Backus maintained a deep appreciation for his Congregational heritage. Stanley Grenz writes, “Backus’ published writings reveal a deep regard for history and a conscientious attempt to bolster argumentation for the truth of opinions by appealing to historical roots.”<sup>53</sup> Grenz also observes the wide variety of sources Backus utilized in compiling his histories. Though a Baptist, he “judiciously sought to prove his orthodoxy and his fidelity to the Reformation tradition by showing that his viewpoints were themselves orthodox and true to that tradition.”<sup>54</sup> In this practice Backus was prudent, utilizing the sources that would be considered most reliable by those toward whom his writing was directed. Backus was so committed to this that “even though he was a full-fledged Baptist for over fifty years, Backus [did] appeal to members of his own denomination either in New England or America as a whole to support his viewpoints.”<sup>55</sup> He did not lack respect for these sources; instead, he wisely evaluated what would speak best to his audience. Backus himself was aware of these sources and used them when

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<sup>52</sup> Barrington R. White, "Isaac Backus and Baptist History," *Baptist History and Heritage* 5, no. 1: 13-23. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost <http://proxy.gordonconwell.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.gordonconwell.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0000725001&loginpage=Login.asp&site=ehost-live&scope=site> (accessed November 21, 2009).

<sup>53</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 188.

<sup>54</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 188.

<sup>55</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 216.

they would prove helpful in persuading his audience. They were a source of enrichment in his personal study as well.<sup>56</sup>

Backus devoted a great deal of time to his work as a historian, an endeavor he took seriously. His historical writings are considered some of the most reliable and thorough for the time period. According to one historian, “Because Isaac Backus was such a key figure for promoting and recording Baptist faith in this era, his story is unusually important.”<sup>57</sup>

He did not seek to write eloquently but he did seek to write accurately. His interest in history “led him to make many journeys, for the purpose of consulting original papers; and they greatly increased the number of his correspondents.”<sup>58</sup> His methods for acquiring the details of the events narrated especially in the second and third volumes of his *Histories* consisted of taking trips to the localities in which the particular events took place and acting as an investigative journalist who searched public records, interviewed eyewitnesses, and gathered as much pertinent information as was available. As a prolific recorder in his diary and journals, he was also able to take many varied materials and

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<sup>56</sup> Isaac Backus, *The Diary of Isaac Backus: Volume II: “1765 – 1785,”* ed. William G. McLoughlin (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1979), 522. This entry shows just one example of Backus interest in Baptist history in England and desire to study it more thoroughly. Backus wrote a letter to John Gill, Separate Baptist theologian in England stating, “And tho’ for several years I have had a desire to get some intelligence about the present state of religion and of the Church of God in the Land of my forefathers nativity; and to contract a correspondence with some of Christs servants there: yet the smallness of my capicity and accomplishments and the obscurity of my citation in A Country Village, seemed to forbid it. But now having had several years acquaintance with a few of your writeings and lately with your elaborate Exposition of the Prophets, I have adventured (thro favour of Mr. [Philip] Freeman your Corrispondent in Boston) to address you, Sir, with a few lines.” William G. McLouglin, ed. “Editor’s Introduction,” to Isaac Backus, “A Short Description of the Difference Between the Bondwoman and the Free,” in *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1968), also writes, “Backus was by this time fairly well-read in Baptist literature, and he chose the writings of John Gill, the eminent English Baptist theologian, as his main line of support.” (130).

<sup>57</sup> Noll, *America’s God*, 149.

<sup>58</sup> Hovey, *A Memoir*, 281.

condense them, incorporating any pertinent information into his histories. His historical writings are considered of benefit to anyone interested in American history because they are “a full storehouse of events, indispensable to every one who would understand the true history of New England.”<sup>59</sup> For those of the Baptist denomination, their benefit is even greater “for they furnish almost the only memorials which have come down to us, of the piety, consistency, and sometimes heroism of brethren who lived in a darker period, and suffered long to obtain the freedom we now enjoy.”<sup>60</sup>

Backus’ lack of a Harvard or Yale education did little to limit him in his work as a historian. He maintained a library full of works that related to the issues facing the church of his day. He kept abreast of the relevant theological and practical issues of his time. He read widely within the religious sphere. He also read John Locke and others when they would benefit his efforts for revival and reform of the church.

His library included various English Baptist authors like John Bunyan. He also had works on the Great Awakening by Thomas Prince and George Whitefield. He kept up with the significant writings for and against the Separates. He read extensively from the seventeenth-century American Puritans like the Mathers and English and American Congregationalists like John Owen and Jonathan Edwards. All of this he integrated and interacted with in his own writings. In terms of history he owned the works of Suetonius, John Knox, and many other crucial historians.<sup>61</sup> Backus’ histories reveal the astounding

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<sup>59</sup> Hovey, *A Memoir*, 281.

<sup>60</sup> Hovey, *A Memoir*, 281.

<sup>61</sup> McLoughlin, *The American Pietistic Tradition*, 191.

breadth of his reading for the purpose of compiling those histories. He read and utilized sources who supported his cause and those who did not:

Backus paged through New England histories such as those by Hutchison and Prince as well as Cotton Mather's biographies and his father (1724), John Eliot (1691), and Jonathan Mitchell (1697), and his New England history, *Magnolis* (1702). Further, he read ancient church histories by Prince (1745) and the German Lutheran, Moshier (trans. 1765). He read Rollin's ancient history of the Egyptians (1749) and was acquainted with Rapin's *History of England*. His view of persecutions was no doubt influenced by Lactantius' work (trans. 1687) and *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (which he read as early as Sept. 27, 1752). Further he was impressed with Clap's account to his children of God's wonderful work among them when they first came to America (which he read on Dec. 25, 1751). He reported having read Neal's *History of the Puritans* (Nov. 2, 1753), Winthrop's journal (Jan. 18, 1775), Hubbard's manuscript (June 21, 1775), and finally Beccaria's book (April, 1789). In addition to the works already mentioned, in his histories Backus made use of Winthrop's *Journal*, Hubbard's history of New England, and the histories written by Hutchinson.<sup>62</sup>

His thorough and careful documentation of history further confirms his commitment to excellence. He voraciously utilized primary sources, spending hours poring over things like church records, court records, archives and private papers. The mere acquisition of these materials was momentous in itself, requiring him to call upon others for assistance. He regularly received copies of letters, diaries, petitions, sermons, church minutes, and other seemingly mundane items to aid his research. Regular quotes from such sources reveal how liberally he utilized these materials.

In all this research and writing Isaac Backus had a particular purpose in mind. He wanted to show how the church had jumped off the course of reformation and how she could return to that course, thereby returning to the ancient practices of the apostolic church.<sup>63</sup> His works of history contributed to his overall desire to bring "society and the

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<sup>62</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 227.

<sup>63</sup> Backus, "Fish Caught," 253.



individuals within it to the place of accepting that faith which Isaac Backus considered to be the historical Christian faith.”<sup>64</sup> In spite of his bias and his lack of formal education, his relaying of history was so reliable that “to this day it remains one of the great source books for Colonial history.”<sup>65</sup>

The final volume of history Backus wrote is particularly relevant. It was an abridgment of his previous works which made it readable for the general public. That combined with the affordability of publication made it accessible to the common reader. The average individual could personally benefit from Backus’ research. His goal of seeing reform on all levels, including the person in the pew, could now be realized in his historic works. He affirms this goal in the preface of his last historical work when he writes, “These things are humbly presented to the public, by their aged friend.”<sup>66</sup>

The priority he placed on history resulted from his Protestant and Puritan roots.<sup>67</sup> He made history relevant to the world in which he lived in part because of the framework through which he approached history. Backus’ historical framework brought together various traditions within Protestantism including his Puritan heritage, his Pietistic ways, and his Baptist beliefs. His historical framework was built on these traditions and consisted of “various layers built upon various traditions.”<sup>68</sup> He understood his place in

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<sup>64</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 91.

<sup>65</sup> McLoughlin, *the American Pietistic Tradition*, 192.

<sup>66</sup> Isaac Backus, *Your Baptist Heritage “1620-1804,”* revised ed. (Little Rock, AR: The Challenge Press, 1976), 18. Original title: *Church History of New England from “1620-1804,”* 1844.

<sup>67</sup> According to Grenz, Backus references “surprisingly few” of the great Puritan divines of England in his writings. However, he frequently quotes John Owen. Grenz believes “that it would appear that Backus considers himself Owen’s spiritual heir.” (191). Backus found in the writings of John Owen “someone with whom he was in fundamental agreement on many of the crucial issues for which he was now struggling.” (194).

<sup>68</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 229.

Protestant history. He respected his Puritan heritage and gave to us a “better understanding of the relationship of the modern American Baptist movement to the entire Protestant movement.”<sup>69</sup>

Backus’ affinity with certain aspects of reformed thought made his use of history relevant. “Backus sought to steer Separate Baptists on a middle course theologically.”<sup>70</sup> He attempted to defend against hyper-Calvinism and Arminianism. He saw both as a threat in light of his alignment with John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards.<sup>71</sup> Backus was particularly interested in the demise of the church from the third century when corruption began to creep in and pollute it with antichristian thoughts. He believed this ultimately led to the rise of the “papal Antichrist” who was finally challenged at the time of the German Reformation. Backus reveals his similarity to these reformers in one of his tracts when he writes:

But O *New England! New England!* Whither art thou fallen! Once it could be said of thee that ‘No man became a *ministry* or *communicant* in thy churches until he had been *severely examined* about his regeneration as well as *conversation*; and if any *minister* did misbehave himself, he soon heard of it and became either a *penitent* or a *deposed* man.’<sup>72</sup>

Backus’ comments are written in the context of his concern over the lax manner in which the church handled church membership and pastoral ordination. By this time in Isaac Backus’ life, the Halfway Covenant had transformed the Puritan ideal of a pure church of

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<sup>69</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 6.

<sup>70</sup> Michael E. Williams, “The Influence of Calvinism on Colonial Baptists,” *Baptist History and Heritage* 39, no. 2 (Spr 2004): 26-39, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 7, 2009).

<sup>71</sup> Williams, “The Influence of Calvinism,” 34-35.

<sup>72</sup> Backus, “Fish Caught,” 253.

visible saints into a “territorial parish system with birthright membership – very similar to that of the established churches in England and Scotland.”<sup>73</sup> For Backus, this resulted in a loss of potential for a pure church as long as the system remained intact.

Backus’ alignment with the English Puritan tradition and the founders of New England was another key element impacting his historical framework. He saw the founding of the colonies as the pinnacle of the Reformation since those who established Plymouth were those who descended from the Separatists in England and, later, Holland. Backus never left the ideal of the Puritans even when he left the Congregational church of his childhood. He left the church because he believed corruption had led to abandonment of the Puritan ideal of renewal and reform within the church. His association with the Baptist church was ultimately because he believed they were picking up that mantle of renewal that had been dropped by other churches and denominations. In its search for the true church, the Puritan church divided into three groups: Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Baptists. Backus believed that it was the Baptist group that was living out the Puritan myth with greatest purity. William McLoughlin summarizes Backus’ journey to this conclusion when he writes:

Backus wanted a Christian nation, he had no precise blueprint for it, and God had not yet revealed one. Luther was a shining light in his day, said Backus, but he failed to see the new light which had been revealed to Calvin. Later the non-separating Calvinists of Robinson’s day (Puritans and Presbyterians) had failed to see the new light of Separatists congregationalism. So too in 1740 the Standing Order failed to see the new light given to the Separate pietists. And two years after writing [“The Nature and Necessity of an Internal Call,”] Backus himself received new light which compelled him to abandon open communion with infant baptizers and to form a closed-communion Baptist church.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> McLoughlin, *Church, State*, 8.

<sup>74</sup> McLoughlin, *Church, State*, 32-33.

Backus' ability to bring together the doctrinal strands of Puritans, Pietists, Separatists, New Lights, and Baptists in his historical framework is astounding. The significance of his work is found in the fact that "it was his continuity with the past which gave meaning to his advancement of the new trends and outlooks which were already taking shape."<sup>75</sup> He was able to understand and interpret these varied influences to promote the reformation he believed necessary to reform the church to the condition God desired in order for her to carry out His Great Commission.

Ultimately, Backus' understanding of God's purpose in the Reformation was to return the church to the ancient practices of the apostolic church. Backus writes in one of his tracts, "Yet now those who are making some imperfect attempts to restore that ancient discipline are thus publicly stigmatized...."<sup>76</sup> He saw Satan using the Antichrist as a means to pollute the church and drive her away from these ancient practices. Backus' desire was to reacquaint the church with and to recapture these ancient practices. He wrote with anticipation of his hope "for a return to the primitive purity and liberty of the Christian Church. To trace out the evil effects of the apostasy, and to promote, as much as may be, such a return, is the design both of this and the former volume."<sup>77</sup>

Isaac Backus studied and wrote history as though he believed he could use it as a mighty tool in the accomplishment of a return to this ideal in his generation. History

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<sup>75</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 5, fn9.

<sup>76</sup> Backus, "Fish Caught," 253.

<sup>77</sup> Isaac Backus, *A History of New England with Particular Reference to the Denomination Called Baptists*, 4 vols. Boston, 1777-1804. Quoted in Barrington R. White, "Isaac Backus and Baptist History," *Baptist History and Heritage* 5, no. 1: 13-23. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost <http://proxy.gordonconwell.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy.gordonconwell.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rh&AN=ATLA0000725001&loginpage=Login.asp&site=ehost-live&scope=site> (accessed November 21, 2009).

uncovered had the ability to heighten the awareness of those in his generation to the corruptions that had crept into the church and the need for reformation to reverse those corruptions. That reversal in New England would require more than just reformation within the church; it would also mean changes to the relationship between the church and the state.

### **The Pursuit of Religious Liberty**

Isaac Backus' journey from an apathetic young man to a fervent pastor striving for widespread revival in his generation led him to become an advocate for the separation of church and state.<sup>78</sup> He was personally and passionately invested in the cause of religious liberty. William McLoughlin calls him "the most forceful and effective writer America produced on behalf of the pietistic or evangelical theory of separation of church and state."<sup>79</sup> The doctrinal transitions that Backus underwent as well as the ecclesial persecutions he witnessed did much to influence his increasing conviction that the church

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<sup>78</sup> Isaac Backus' concern when it came to the separation of church and state was primarily for religious freedom. His understanding was rooted in the freedom of individuals and churches to have the freely operate as they chose and be supported by those who attended. His understanding of each person's liberty of conscience meant that individuals should not be forced by the civil authorities to attend and support an established church through compulsory taxation. He rejoiced in the civil liberty that the Revolutionary war won for the colonies, but he still had to stand for religious liberty as Massachusetts created a constitution to replace their colonial charter. Backus was working to ensure that religious taxes would not continue to be collected and distributed to the established church or the church recognized by the state as the sanctioned church. Backus wanted to see compulsory religious taxation ended so that individuals could freely choose to financially support the church they attended. Though much of Backus early work led him to find was to attain exemption from religious taxation for the movement that was only a temporary solution. Because he believed that the Baptist movement was more pure and holy than the Standing congregations, Backus desired to undermine the Puritan Christian commonwealth. Rather than a reformation from within, Backus came to believe that only a whole new structure would bring about the changes necessary. McLoughlin, *Church, State*, 13-14, 20-27.

<sup>79</sup> McLoughlin, *Church, State*, 1.

could not return to its primitive purity unless some fundamental changes took place in society.

Isaac Backus' rejection of infant baptism played a major part in his convictions concerning the separation of church and state. He saw infant baptism as a corruption of the church that helped to foster a connection between church and state. This corruption exalted institutions and devalued individuals. It was a corruption that had interrupted the reformation of the church that began in the sixteenth century. He believed the reformation had crossed the Atlantic with the colonists but had veered off track in part by maintaining their false belief in infant baptism. This belief coincided with their eventual militant enforcement of conformity to their version of a Christian theocracy. For Backus, the abandonment of infant baptism and the separation of church and state were essential to the freedom of each individual's conscience and religion.<sup>80</sup>

Isaac Backus' journey to the pastorate also contributed to his efforts as an activist for religious liberty and the separation of church and state. His service as a pastor was considered illegal in New England.<sup>81</sup> Ministerial call and ordination were the result of aligning with the Standing Order and abiding by their requirements. The evidence of an internal call to ministry meant little. The Standing Order felt that doctrinal purity was crucial and believed that this was accomplished through education at either Harvard or Yale.<sup>82</sup> Those who did not complete these requirements were considered outcasts.

Backus had no problem with the illegal nature of his pastorate because of his conviction

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<sup>80</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 150-180, 226-232.

<sup>81</sup> His was an internal call followed by ordination through his local congregation. The formal requirements for pastoring in New England were graduation from Harvard or Yale followed by ordination through a county consociation.

<sup>82</sup> McLoughlin, *Church, State*, 54, 208.

that internal call and ordination by the local congregation held greater weight for pastoring than formal education and the endorsement of other pastors in the area. But the results of his being considered an illegal pastor still affected him and his church.

This was a time when Separate and Baptist churches in Colonial New England consistently faced persecution. Backus saw oppression at the hands of the religious establishment. He experienced persecution firsthand.<sup>83</sup> He possessed justification for separating himself from all that was related to those who were persecuting him, his church, and Baptists in general. There were those who chose this course, resulting in anti-confessionalism and, thereby, a disregard for anything related to those responsible for their oppression and persecution.<sup>84</sup> If Backus had ultimately chosen this course, it

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<sup>83</sup> Backus was not a member of the Standing Order in New England and so was not to preach in the pulpit of a Congregational church. Those churches that were recognized by the Standing Order were sanctioned by the governing bodies of New England, and their pastors received their salary through taxes paid by the local residents surrounding the church. So Isaac Backus not only did not receive compensation for his preaching, but he was also required to pay tax to cover the salary of the pastor filling the pulpit in the established church. This resulted in some hardship for Backus, including what he describes in a memorandum dated Monday, February 6, 1749. He writes, "This morning I was seized by the officer, who threatened to carry me to prison for the precinct-rate; but, glory to God, he gave me a sweet calmness and serenity of soul, so that I was able not to fear the officer, or treat him with any bitterness. I told him that they were going on in an unscriptural way to support the gospel, and therefore I could do nothing to countenance them in such a way. He told me that if I would not pay him he would immediately carry me to jail; but just as he was about to drag me away, there came a man, who called him out and paid him the money, so that he was forced to let me go. After they had imprisoned one of our brethren, and made distress on one of my hearers, it appeared upon trial in our county court, that said tax was voted at an illegal meeting. Yet they sent an agent to Boston and obtained an Act of their Legislature to make it legal, and their supreme executive court turned the case against my hearer upon said Act. Thus was judgment turned into wormwood; and this is the natural effect of the use of the sword to support religious teachers." Hovey, *A Memoir*, 71. A nice summary of this situation and the persecution can be found in McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus*, 110 – 135.

<sup>84</sup> Baptist anti-confessionalism can be traced most clearly to the Separate Baptist movement in America during the Puritan age in New England and to Alexander Campbell on the American frontier. Their emphasis on individual experience over doctrine and a lack of adequate doctrinal literacy coupled with their past experience with New England Congregationalism drove them to reject Confessions as "constitutions of repression." This was the age of Isaac Backus. He was well aware of the *Cambridge Platform* (1648) which united church and state, and the *Saybrook Platform* (1708) which greatly restricted the freedom of individuals and churches. Only those churches who were recognized by neighboring churches and local governments could be ordained. Only ordained churches' ministers received salaries. These salaries were collected through the local courts and were mandatory payments made even by those not attending the ordained churches. Individuals were free to attend whatever place of worship they desired, but if they were to support their own minister, it was over and above the taxes already paid, if they

would have meant a disconnect from many resources he used liberally in researching and writing his histories and his other writings. It also would have meant throwing out material he used from his Puritan heritage that was critical to his campaign for religious liberty. Instead of choosing this path, we are the beneficiaries of Isaac Backus' ability to exercise great discernment in his use of a vast array of resources. Rather than being reactive to what was going on around him, Backus models a proactive approach to reforming the situation he faced. Backus actually saw his labors in researching and writing history as a resource for promoting religious liberty. "His History was deliberately intended as one more weapon in the struggle to reform the attitudes and break the power which made the infliction of persecution possible."<sup>85</sup>

Backus' theological positions and pastoral ministry illuminate his work for religious liberty. Though he did not write a tract specifically addressing the separation of church and state until 1768,<sup>86</sup> his writings prior to that reveal the theological underpinnings of his rationale for religious liberty. As has been observed, his writing in defense of his call and pastoral ministry consisted in part of an attack on the Standing

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could get a pastor in the first place. The result for Separate Baptists was a significantly bitter taste in their mouth because of these abuses which they associated with confessions. Therefore, if Separate Baptists were exerting their influence in a locality the use of confessions was avoided. Alexander Campbell used the spirit of the frontier to prejudice many against confessions. Those who braved the frontier already carried with them an attitude of freedom and independence which Campbell so successfully tapped into that "little is heard of confessions in the South between 1840 and 1900." William L. Lumpkin, "The Nature and Authority of Baptist Confessions of Faith," *Review & Expositor* 76.1 (1979): 17-28, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCO (accessed, December 31, 2010).

<sup>85</sup> Barrington R. White, "Isaac Backus and Baptist History." *Baptist History and Heritage* 5, no. 1: 13-23. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 21, 2009).

<sup>86</sup> Isaac Backus wrote a total of forty-two books and tracts. Only seven are devoted to the issue of religious freedom.



Order.<sup>87</sup> He utilized the *Cambridge Platform* in his argument and asserted that the Standing Order had corrupted the principles found there, removing ordination from the individual church's responsibility. This was more than just a defense of his personal ministry, he "was attacking a fundamental link in the chain of Puritan ecclesiastical and social theory."<sup>88</sup>

In addition, Backus' denial of infant baptism called into question the attempts in New England to establish a Christian commonwealth. The more he delved into this issue the more he realized that what was needed was more than just a reformation of a few corruptions in the system. Instead, he went farther than most of his Separate brothers by acknowledging that the whole structure had to be changed. The framework of a parish system that incorporated church and state in the Puritan colonies based on covenant theology had to be abandoned for the sake of the pure church ideal. The Standing Order had been unwilling to abandon their covenant theology or infant baptism and instead compromised the pure church ideal. Backus chose to believe that if Baptists sought to cling to the pure church ideal "churches would continually be replenished by saints who themselves would constitute a leavening influence in society."<sup>89</sup> The result would be the ushering in of the kingdom of God.<sup>90</sup>

Backus was primarily concerned for the souls of men and women, a fact that can be seen even in his writings for religious liberty. He agreed with the framers of the

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<sup>87</sup> Isaac Backus, *The Nature and Necessity of an Internal Call to Preach the Everlasting Gospel: With Marks to Distinguish the Ministers of Christ from All Deceivers* (Boston: Printed and sold by Samuel Hall, in Cornhill, 1792).

<sup>88</sup> McLoughlin, *Introduction, Church, State*, 33.

<sup>89</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 83.

<sup>90</sup> Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 83.

Constitution that civil government served “as a means of checks and balances against the depravity of man.”<sup>91</sup> Additionally he believed that “God has appointed two kinds of government...which are distinct in their nature and ought never to be confounded together, one of which is called civil the other ecclesiastical government.”<sup>92</sup> Each government had differing tasks and responsibilities that should be kept separate. Backus believed “it is impossible to blend church and state together without violating our Lord’s commands to both.”<sup>93</sup> Separation was meant to produce a harmony of these two institutions.<sup>94</sup> They were established by God and designed for harmony rather than competition.<sup>95</sup> But competition is what Backus witnessed in the situation around him. At one point he writes “we have a generation of Christians now who pay so little regard to God’s authority that few of them would do anything to support their teachers if man’s authority was not exerted in the affair.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> McLoughlin, *Introduction, Isaac Backus*, 42.

<sup>92</sup> Isaac Backus, “An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty, 1773,” in McLoughlin, *Church, State*, 312.

<sup>93</sup> Isaac Backus, “Policy as Well as Honesty, Boston, 1779,” in McLoughlin, *Church, State*, 375.

<sup>94</sup> “Backus, like the framers of the Constitution, conceived of government as a means of checks and balances against the depravity of man.” His theology formed the framework for his understanding of civil government. He believed that “the existence of Gospel-Churches was essential to the well-being and safety of the civil state.” He believed that though men set the ordinances of civil government for the Lord’s sake. Therefore, the secularization of civil government would be detrimental to the health of a nation. The civil government is to guard the peace and civil rights of its citizens, for the sake of the Lord. The ecclesiastical government is to win souls to Christ. Though secularization would be detrimental it would not necessarily have devastating effects as long as civil government created and maintained an environment in which “truth is free to act.” Backus believed that this allowed the church to serve as a “missionary enterprise” that converts individuals who in turn become good citizens. Grenz writes, “Herein, then, is the ‘sweet harmony’ between church and state; Christ is sovereign in his church and through his people draws the individual members of society to acknowledge the truth of Christianity, in which the state is benefited because ‘real Christians are the best subjects of civil government in the world.’” Grenz, *Isaac Backus*, 166. McLoughlin, *Church, State*, 34-45.

<sup>95</sup> Backus, “Fish Caught,” 190 – 191.

<sup>96</sup> Backus, “Fish Caught,” 239.

Isaac Backus was only one of the voices during this time concerned about religious liberty. Men like George Mason, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison were also calling for the separation of church and state. However, the founding fathers approached the issue from a differing set of foundational beliefs.<sup>97</sup> Men like Jefferson approached the issue from a reasonable, man-centered framework in which they were “concerned with the social and political welfare of the individual personality in relation to his fellow men on earth.”<sup>98</sup> Backus, on the other hand, approached the issue from a pietistic God-centered framework and was “concerned with the spiritual welfare of the individual soul in relation to God and eternity.”<sup>99</sup>

Backus celebrated the victory won for the colonies through the Revolutionary War. However, he recognized that civil liberty was not religious liberty, so his quest carried on among the colony’s legislatures. As Massachusetts set out to adopt a new constitution, Backus protested it because it still supported the tax system that supported

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<sup>97</sup> During the Revolutionary period evangelical and deistic forms of religion shared many viewpoints; however, their foundational understanding of God and his work among men differed in a few significant ways. Mark Noll writes that the deist understanding of God was “a kindly deity... This God had made the world an orderly and understandable place. He was ‘nature’s God,’ as the Declaration of Independence put it, who had created humankind with nearly infinite potential. The men who put the nation together were sincere moralists and great humanitarians. They were entirely convinced that human exertion and goodwill could make America into a nearly ideal place, perhaps even a millennial place... They had found in God what they most admired in humanity.” Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 135-136.

<sup>98</sup> McLoughlin, *Church, State*, 47 – 48.

<sup>99</sup> McLoughlin, *Church, State*, 47. What follows is Isaac Backus’ articulation of the Baptist view of true liberty. “The true liberty of man is to know, obey, and enjoy his Creator and to do all the good unto, and enjoy all the happiness with and in, his fellow creatures that he is capable of. In order to which the law of love was written in his heart which carries in its nature union and benevolence to Being in general and to each being in particular according to its relation and connection to and with the Supreme Being and ourselves. Each rational soul, as he is a part of the whole system of rational beings, so it was and is both his duty and his liberty to regard the good of the whole in all his actions. To love ourselves and truly to seek our own welfare, is both liberty and our indispensable duty. But the conceit that man could advance either his honor or happiness by disobedience instead of obedience was first injected by the *father of lies*, and all such conceits ever since are as false as he is.” Backus, “An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty,” 309 – 310.

Standing Ministers. Though Backus was not a part of the committee that drafted the Massachusetts Bill of Rights, he was able to exert his influence through a friend before proceedings began. Backus' friend, Noah Alden, asked for Backus' thoughts on the bill of rights. Backus responded with a four-page letter.<sup>100</sup> Alden was elected chairman of the committee responsible for drafting the bill of rights and, though the majority of the committee opposed Alden's views, Backus ended up with a strong indirect influence through him.<sup>101</sup>

Backus knew that if he was to get anywhere in the struggle for the separation of church and state, it would require combined efforts. While he struggled individually for religious freedom, he also aligned himself with others who were moving in the same direction. He recognized the power present in united efforts to bring about change. One example of the united effort in Backus' life can be seen in his involvement with the Warren Association. The churches that formed the Association provided a larger platform for united action by Baptists in the face of tax collectors' persecution. In 1679, the Association formed a grievance committee to which Isaac Backus was appointed. One of the issues the Grievance Committee tackled was the Ashfield Law, which they contested was unconstitutional. It required that all residents of Ashfield pay tax to support the Standing Minister without regard for exemption status. The Committee ultimately had to appeal to the King of England for the law to be repealed.<sup>102</sup> The whole process set

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<sup>100</sup> Full text of the bill of rights Backus proposed can be found at, Appendix 24, "A Declaration of the Rights, of the Inhabitants of the State of Massachusetts-Bay, in New-England," Backus, *Diary, Volume III*, 1603-1607.

<sup>101</sup> McLoughlin, *the American Pietistic Tradition*, 143-144.

<sup>102</sup> Hovey, *A Memoir*, 174 – 175. Hovey writes that the petitions made by the grievance committee were completely disregarded. In their effort to gather support for their cause, the grievance committee published the following in the Boston Evening Post on August 30, 1770, "To the Baptists in the

Backus apart as a hard-working and tenacious advocate for religious liberty among his peers. He eventually ended up as chair of the Committee. Though his work with the Grievance Committee caused some to question his loyalty to the patriot cause when the war for independence broke out, Backus was ready to break with England. His motivations were not for the crown or the colonies. He was working to win religious freedom and saw Anglicanism every bit as much a threat to attaining religious freedom for all, and more so, as Congregationalism was to individuals in New England.

Isaac Backus' most profound and lasting impact in American history has been in the area of religious liberty. His writings are limited in this specific area, yet they reveal his motivation for reformation that would ultimately lead to what he saw as the imminent Baptist millennium.<sup>103</sup> Sadly, he did not live to see his pursuit of the separation of church and state become a reality, yet his work contributed greatly to its final establishment. He was confident that by achieving the separation of church and state he was moving deeper into reformation. He saw the achievement of religious liberty for all men as a crucial step in the overall vision of renewing and reviving the Church. His work for religious liberty

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Province of Massachusetts Bay, who are, or have been oppressed in any way on a religious account. It would be needless to tell you that you have long felt the effects of the laws by which the religion of the government in which you live is established. Your purses have felt the burden of ministerial rates; and when these would not satisfy your enemies, your property hath been taken from you and sold for less than half its value. These things you cannot forget. You will therefore readily hear and attend, when you are desired to collect your cases of suffering and have them well attested, - such as, the taxes you have paid to build meeting-houses, to settle ministers and support them, with all the time, money and labor you have lost in waiting on courts, feeing lawyers, etc., to be holden at Bellingham; when measures will be resolutely adopted for obtaining redress from another quarter than that to which repeated application hath been made unsuccessfully. Nay, complaints, however just and grievous, have been treated with indifference, and scarcely, if at all, credited. We deem this our conduct perfectly justifiable; and hope you will pay particular regard to this desire, and be exact in your accounts. Boston, July 31, 1770." This was followed by a meeting in September by the Warren Association in which they made a unanimous resolution to appeal to the British court if there was no help found in America.

<sup>103</sup> Isaac Backus, "Truth is Great and Will Prevail, Boston, 1781," in McLoughlin, *Church, State*, 424 - 425.

reveals a man who was able to see his situation with objectivity and utilize means and methods others overlooked due to personal biases.

The life and legacy of Isaac Backus is a veritable treasure trove of wisdom for Baptists seeking revival and renewal in their congregations. It is time to unearth the buried treasure found there and take advantage of his example. Baptists will benefit greatly from the continued examination of his practical example for seeking life change and reformation in our congregations, individually and collectively. By developing our understanding and appreciation of Isaac Backus, the hope is that, as we understand his place in church history and his work as a pastor, we will use his life as a catalyst for evaluating our own situation. For those who share his passion for motivating life change, his approach to ministry affords us the spark needed to ignite our orthodoxy with vibrancy and catapult it to succeeding generations, even those yet to be born.

## CHAPTER 5

### VIBRANT ORTHODOXY

I will run in the way of your commandments for you set my heart free.  
-Psalm 119:32 ESV

*Dead Poet's Society* is the story of a group of boys who attend Welton Academy, a fictitious boys' prep school with a reputation of graduating some of the best and brightest young minds in America. The school prided itself in its four pillars: tradition, honor, discipline, and excellence. However, despite the academy's stellar reputation for producing rigorously prepared students, the rich heritage of the school is lost on the boys who mock the four pillars as lifeless symbol and empty tradition.

The pressure many of the students feel from the school and from their parents threatens to drain the vitality from their young impressionable lives - that is, until they meet their new English teacher, John Keating. Keating awakens within the boys a passion for life.

From their first day of class with Keating the boys are acutely aware that he is different from their other teachers. He takes the boys to the main entryway of the school for their first class. There, Keating teaches in front of the school's trophy cases. He introduces the students to the phrase *Carpe Diem* "seize the day." Keating challenges the boys to take a good look at the photographed faces in the trophy cases. They are of boys who, he says, are just like them only from an earlier time at Welton. They look similar with similar hopes and dreams of greatness. Keating continues by informing his class that these faces of the past are now food for worms, now fertilizing daffodils. At this

point Keating instructs his class to lean in to the trophy cases and listen closely for the message from these faces from the past. As the boys inch closer and closer the scene closes with Keating whispering these words from behind the boys, “If you listen real close, you can hear them whisper their legacy to you... Listen, you hear it? *Carpe*... Hear it? *Carpe, carpe diem*, seize the day boys, make your lives extraordinary.”<sup>1</sup>

Most of us long to have extraordinary lives. Most of us long to live lives filled with vibrancy and passion. That is what most followers of Christ desire for themselves and for their children. The last thing we want is dead faith built on lifeless symbol and dried up tradition. We want a faith rooted in the gospel that possesses passion and vibrancy. If that is what we possess and that is what we pass on, then most of us would consider our lives extraordinary. Yet, this vibrancy often fluctuates and fizzles with each passing generation. Instead of seizing the day and making our faith extraordinary, many times we barely reach ordinary.

Isaac Backus is the John Keating for Christians. His legacy calls us to seize the day and make our lives extraordinary. As John Keating would say, Isaac Backus sucked the marrow out of his faith. He did not waste a moment or an opportunity, and the fruit of his life lived this way continues to reverberate in our generation. Isaac Backus passed on his faith in such a way that it has continued to be passed on to each succeeding generation for the last two centuries. He stands as a practical example in our current atmosphere of not only how to live out our own faith but how to pass it on in such a way that it can be embraced, absorbed, and handed off by each succeeding generation in ways

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<sup>1</sup> *Dead Poet's Society*, DVD, Directed by, Peter Weir, 1989: Burbank, CA: Buena Vista, 1998.



that maintain the orthodoxy and the effervescence of our faith from generation to generation.

### **Beyond Isaac Backus: A Lasting Legacy**

The foundation for Isaac Backus' lasting legacy began in his own lifetime. He saw much fruit in the midst of his laboring for religious liberty, recording history, and pastoring. Yet, the greatest fruit in each of these areas came after Isaac Backus' death,<sup>2</sup> revealing that he saw his work in each of these endeavors as a small part of the larger picture. As important as his contribution was, it was just that, a contribution that built on the foundation he inherited. Throughout his life he bestowed what he had received to others in hopes that they would follow his example and do the same.

Isaac Backus left materials that afford us the opportunity to look into his contribution and find clues as to how and why his ministry has resulted in such a lasting legacy. These materials display that every conviction and every endeavor in his life worked out practically. Backus spent his lifetime seeking to be rooted doctrinally. Additionally, he sought to express his doctrinal roots contextually.

Backus extended his arms into the past and used his faith heritage to provide strong roots for his and other's faith. He planted his feet firmly in his present environment, which he interpreted through the needs and concerns he witnessed around him. His interpretation influenced his overall understanding of the world in which he lived and ministered. And he directed his eyes toward the future, leading him to be a forward thinker who passed on his convictions to his flock in practical reproducible ways.

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<sup>2</sup> Isaac Backus died in 1806, five years before the passage of the "Religious Liberty Act" of 1811. Appreciation for his histories has grown over the centuries since his death, and his church continues to be a beacon in the Middleboro community and across the globe through missions.

The confessions of faith and church covenants Isaac Backus drafted for the two churches he pastored provide lasting examples of his commitment to pursue and teach biblically faithful doctrine.<sup>3</sup> The two were written within ten years of one another and reveal the development of his theology during that time. The second confession, written for First Baptist Church Middleboro, is similar to the first with just a few revisions. Each confession contains two parts. Part one is *articles of faith*, and part two is concerning church affairs. The primary change from the first confession to the second in the *articles of faith* section is the inclusion of a statement outlining the role of civil government and a stronger stand on religious liberty.<sup>4</sup> In the second part, changes reflect Backus' shift to believer's baptism and a firmer stance concerning church autonomy, which grew in tandem with his passion for religious liberty.<sup>5</sup>

Isaac Backus did not create these documents in a vacuum. Through a study of these confessions one can discern Backus' dependence upon others' works. He reached out and harvested the resources of his generation. He also reached back and leaned on key resources assembled through the history of the church. His agreement with the Creeds of the Early Church shines through in the doctrinal portion of these documents.<sup>6</sup> His Puritan roots are evident as well throughout these documents.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix Three for full versions of each Confession.

<sup>4</sup> Article 16, part one is the added statement concerning the place of civil government.

<sup>5</sup> See Articles 2, 3, and 4 part two in the Titicut Confession to Articles 2 and 3 part two in the Middleborough Confession.

<sup>6</sup> Backus' *Articles* are consistent with the theology found in the Creeds of the Early Church throughout. One example can be seen by comparing the language Backus uses in Articles 2 and 10 concerning the nature of Jesus Christ. Backus writes, "That there are three Persons in the Godhead, the Father, Son, and holy Ghost, who are but one God, the same Substance, equal in power and glory....10. Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God hath come and taken on him Humane-Nature and in that Nature hath yielded a perfect Obedience to the Law that we have Broken..." The Confession of Faith and Covenant of the Church of Christ in Titicut," Appendix 19 in *Isaac Backus, Diary*, Volume III, ed. William G.

It is likely Backus used multiple resources rather than one model for his confessions of faith. Though they possess Backus' own uniqueness, they also possess similarities with *The Waterland Confession* of 1580, *A True Confession* of 1596, and *A Short Confession of Faith* of 1610, among others.<sup>8</sup>

Backus' commitment to historic and doctrinal roots has continued throughout the history of the second church he pastored. When the original confession for the Baptist church in Middleboro, written by Backus, is compared to the statement of faith that First Baptist Church of North Middleboro currently uses to guide them, the roots established by Backus are still evident.<sup>9</sup> The beauty of this rootedness is that the current statement of faith possesses both similarity and distinction from the one that Backus wrote. It appears that each generation was granted the freedom to express the elements of their faith uniquely within their context. This was a liberty which Backus took advantage of within

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McLoughlin, (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1979). Compare with this portion of the Nicene Creed (381). "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father." Nicene Creed (381), <http://www.creeds.net/> (accessed November 22, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> Puritans were deeply committed to living holy lives. Isaac Backus incorporates this conviction most clearly into *The Covenant* portion of the *Articles*. He writes, "We acknowledge our everlasting and indispensable Obligation to glorify our God by living a holy, righteous and Godly Life, in this present World in all our several Places and Relations: and we do engage by the assistance of the divine Spirit to improve all our time and strength, talents, and advantages for his glory and the good of our fellowmen: Promising by divine help to walk in our Houses with a perfect heart, and to train up those under our Care in the ways of God." Appendix 19 in *Isaac Backus, Diary*, Volume III, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1979). Compare this with the following from John Owen's Shorter Catechism. "Q. 5. What is that holiness which is required of us? A. That universal sincere obedience to the whole will of God, in our hearts, minds, wills, and actions, whereby we are in some measure made conformable to Christ, our head... Q. 6. Is this holiness or obedience in us perfect? A. Yes, in respect of all the parts of it, but not in respect of the degrees wherein God requires it... Q. 8. *What are the parts of this holiness?* A. Internal, in the quickening of all graces, purging all sins; and external, in fervent and frequent prayers, alms, and all manner of righteousness. Particular precepts are innumerable." John Owen, *Two Short Catechisms*, "Chapter XX- of Sanctification," (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965). <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/owen/catechisms.v.xx.html> (accessed November 22, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> Full text and some background material for each of these confessions can be found in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, rev. ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969).

<sup>9</sup> First Baptist Church, North Middleboro's current Statement of Faith can be found in Appendix three.

his lifetime, drafting the new documents for the Baptist Church of Middleboro at its beginning rather than just adopting carte blanche the former statement of faith he wrote for the Separate Church in Titicut, Massachusetts. Backus modeled certainty by holding tightly to essentials of the faith while holding loosely non-essentials.

Backus leaned on the larger witness of the Church in his commitment to doctrinal purity. When he found resources that could serve to firmly root his congregation, he made the most of them. His use of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* in his life and ministry serves as an example. The overall influence of the *Westminster Confession* was immense. “Edwards, Whitefield, Tennent, the New Lights, and even the Separates and Separate-Baptists all professed to be Calvinists and claimed that the *Westminster Confession of Faith* accurately expressed their doctrines.”<sup>10</sup> By joining this immense and diverse group of individuals Backus reveals his desire to find points of agreement, where possible, outside his own denomination.

Backus saw the *Westminster Confession* as a powerful and practical tool for advancing ministry. Early in his ministry he used it for educating children. It served as an influential document in the establishment of the Warren Association.<sup>11</sup> The language of the *Westminster Catechism* can be discerned in Backus’ definition of the Baptist view of religious liberty:

The true liberty of man is to know, obey, and enjoy his Creator and to do all the good unto and enjoy all the happiness with and in his fellow creatures that he is capable of; in order to which the law of love was written in his heart which carries in its nature union and benevolence to Being in general, and to each being in

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<sup>10</sup> William G. McLoughlin, Introduction of, *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism, Pamphlets 1754 – 1789*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1968), 54.

<sup>11</sup> The *Second London Confession*, 1689 was the confession adopted by the Warren Association in an effort to win over Separate Baptists of New England to join the Association. See Isaac Backus, *The Diary of Isaac Backus, Volume II, 1765 – 1785* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1979), 733.

particular... Hence it is so far from being necessary for any man to give up any part of his real liberty in order to submit to government, that all nations have found it necessary to submit to some government in order to enjoy any liberty and security at all.<sup>12</sup>

Backus also used the *Westminster Confession of Faith* in his first published tract.<sup>13</sup> He used it as a source of credibility since it was utilized and respected by those who opposed his position. Backus wrote the pamphlet to “justify his serving as pastor of the open-communion Separate church in Titicut, Massachusetts.”<sup>14</sup> He responded to the objection that ministers must know the original languages in order to preach what is right and wrong by revealing support to the contrary from Scripture. He then turned to the *Westminster Confession* and wrote, “After mentioning sundry arguments that may induce us to believe the Scriptures, say, ‘Yet notwithstanding, our full persuasion and assurance of the infallible truth and divine authority thereof is from the inward work of the Holy Spirit bearing witness by and with the Word in our hearts.’”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Isaac Backus, *An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty*, Boston 1773, in William G. McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus, on Church, State, and Calvinism* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1968), 309 – 310. Reference to Question 1, 2, and 36 are recognized in this definition. “Q. 1. What is the chief end of man? A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. Q. 2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him? A. The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him. Q. 36. What are the benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification? A. The benefits which in this life do accompany or flow from justification, adoption, and sanctification, are, assurance of God’s love, peace of conscience, joy in the Holy Ghost, increase of grace, and perseverance therein to the end.” *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, <http://www.reformed.org/documents/WSC.html> (accessed December 29, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> Isaac Backus, *A Discourse Showing the Nature and Necessity of an Internal Call to Preach the Everlasting Gospel: With Marks to Distinguish the Ministers of Christ from All Deceivers* (Boston: Printed and sold by Samuel Hall, in Cornhill, 1792). in *Isaac Backus, on Church, State, and Calvinism*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1968.

<sup>14</sup> William G. McLoughlin, Editor’s Introduction to “Internal Call,” *Isaac Backus on Church, State, and Calvinism, Pamphlets 1754 – 1789* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1968), 66.

<sup>15</sup> Isaac Backus, “A Discourse Showing the Nature and Necessity of an Internal Call to Preach the Everlasting Gospel,” in *Isaac Backus on Church, State and Calvinism, Pamphlets 1754 – 1789*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1968), 103. Isaac Backus’ citation of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* is from Chapter 1, section 5.

Backus' desire to connect with the larger witness of the Church did not soften his commitment to maintaining doctrinal purity. Because he was doctrinally rooted he possessed the framework to recognize the religious groups during the 1790s who were abandoning "too much of the traditional Protestant heritage."<sup>16</sup> Backus was wary of the Shakers, the Free Will Baptists, and the Universalists during this time. Like the Patristic Fathers who had gone before him, Backus was able to recognize deviations from orthodox faith and Protestant heritage. He subsequently challenged believers to stay the course of orthodoxy through things like his use of catechisms and confessions.

Backus longed to see the establishment of Christians who were rooted doctrinally. He labored to make this longing a reality. One of the key methods he used for this process was catechism. He utilized catechism to help children, youth, and new believers grow spiritually. He saw the benefit of catechesis for nurturing a rootedness with the heritage of the church. Catechism provided him with a way to pass on the entirety of his faith to succeeding generations. The question and answer format for each of the statements within a confession of faith proved manageable for even young children to commit to memory even if they did not fully understand what they were memorizing. Backus recognized that this method also mirrors the model delineated in the Old Testament.<sup>17</sup>

Isaac Backus' diary reveals that early in his ministry he used the *Westminster Confession of Faith* and its shorter catechism to catechize children. The minutes of

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<sup>16</sup> Mark A Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 150.

<sup>17</sup> See Exodus 12:26 and Deuteronomy 6:20-25 for examples. See also chapter 2 of this thesis, section entitled, "Scripture's Voice for Multigenerational Faith."

Titicut Separate Church dated July 13, 1750, reveal, “This afternoon I began first To Catechize the Children: there was but few came. But I had some Sweetness in the Exercise.”<sup>18</sup> Again a few months later on Friday, September 21, 1750, Backus recorded, “Catecized the Children and Preached a Lecture on Middleborough.”<sup>19</sup> Later in his ministry Backus appears to have stepped away from the use of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, since it taught infant baptism, in favor of a Baptist Catechism to be produced and published by the Warren Association.<sup>20</sup> The tools may have changed for Backus but the method remained a part of Backus’ pastoral ministry.

The very word “catechism” stirs up negative images for some. It may cause suspicion for some because they believe mysterious rituals surround it, or it may cause a blanket of lethargy to come over others as the thought of Saturday classes in the middle of the sunny summer come to mind. But these images are misconceptions of what catechism really is. For most of us who have been associated with the Baptist church during the last century, we do not merely possess a misconception of catechism; it is an alien concept for us.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Isaac Backus, *The Diary of Isaac Backus, Volume I: 1741 – 1764*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1979), 92.

<sup>19</sup> Backus, *The Diary, Volume I*, 100.

<sup>20</sup> Isaac Backus, *The Diary of Isaac Backus, Volume II*, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1979), 1108, 1126, 1146. Isaac Backus did not take part in the production of the Baptist catechism; however, as member of the Warren Association, he would have voted on its production, approval, and publishing.

<sup>21</sup> The birth and growth of the Sunday School movement in the nineteenth century greatly impacted the use and familiarity of catechisms among Baptists. Sunday School appears to have all but replaced catechism in training children in spiritual formation. Children began attending Sunday School en masse and by 1889 roughly ten million people were enrolled in Sunday School in the United States. Michael J. Anthony and Warren S. Benson, *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education: Principles for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2003), 269. See also, Robert W. Lynn and Elliott Wright, *The Big Little School: Sunday Child of American Protestantism* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1971).

The word catechesis is biblical in origin, deriving from the Greek word *katecheo*. *Katecheo* means “to share a communication that one receives” or “to teach, instruct.”<sup>22</sup> It refers to the vital ministry of instructing and teaching for spiritual formation. It is biblical, and practicing it has proven effective in the history of the Church. Because it is biblical we would be wise to see it as essential.<sup>23</sup>

J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett provide us with a clear and simple definition of catechesis: “the church’s ministry of grounding and growing God’s people in the Gospel and its implications for doctrine, devotion, duty, and delight.”<sup>24</sup> This definition offers a glimpse into why previous generations of Baptists believed catechism was an important element in the overall goal of spiritual formation. Catechism grounds and grows people in the content and the zeal inclusive in the Gospel. This is what followers of Jesus Christ desire to pass on to succeeding generations. Catechism, properly understood and practiced, offers us a powerful tool for accomplishing this task.

Isaac Backus is surrounded by a large cloud of witnesses who have taken advantage of the benefits of using catechism for spiritual formation. Timothy and Denise George have observed, “From the earliest days, Baptists have published catechisms and used them as a means of imparting basic Christian instruction to new believers and

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<sup>22</sup> *κατηχεω* make oneself understood. 2. Teach, instruct. In our lit. only of instruction in religious matters. b. in the specif. sense of catechetical instruction by the church given instruction to catechumens. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s. v. “*κατηχεω*,” (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

<sup>23</sup> J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 27-32. Chapter 2 provides an in depth study of the biblical roots of catechesis.

<sup>24</sup> Packer and Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel*, 29. John Piper keeps it even more simple and straightforward, “It simply means to teach Biblical truth in an orderly way. Generally this is done with questions and answers accompanied by Biblical support and explanation.” John Piper, *A Baptist Catechism* (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God Ministries), 1.



passing on the faith intact to the rising generations.”<sup>25</sup> The earliest Baptists saw the spiritual formation of children as the primary responsibility of the parents.<sup>26</sup> The catechisms produced were designed to aid parents in this process. Since baptism was kept for adults only, parents had their children’s formative years to train them in spiritual formation prior to baptism.<sup>27</sup> The church aided in the spiritual formation process with children as has been observed in the ministry of Isaac Backus. The church and school reinforced the catechisms expected to be taught in the home.<sup>28</sup>

One of the most widely used catechisms among Baptists in America and England was the one written by Baptist Benjamin Keach with the help of William Collins that was known simply as *Keach’s Catechism* (1693). It was written to help clarify the theology

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<sup>25</sup> Timothy and Denise George, Introduction, *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms*, eds. Timothy and Denise George (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 16.

<sup>26</sup> W. M. S. West, “The Child and the Church: A Baptist Perspective,” in *Pilgrim Pathways: Essays in Baptist History in Honour of B. R. White*, ed. William R. Brackney and Paul S. Fiddes (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999). This conviction and the consequent Baptist practice is evidence of the Puritans roots from which the Baptist denomination grew. One example of the Puritan attitude to parent’s responsibility in the spiritual formation of children can be discerned in the following lines, “The chief end of every Christian parent must be the spiritual interests the religious character the eternal salvation of his children.” John Angell James, *The Family Monitor or a Help to Domestic Happiness* (New York: Thomas George Jr, 1836), 26. In addition, Jonathan Edwards wrote, ““Every Christian family ought to be as it were a little church, consecrated to Christ, and wholly influenced and governed by his rules. And family education and order are some of the chief means of grace.” Jonathan Edwards, “Farewell Sermon Preached at the First Precinct of Northampton,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume One*, ed. Edward Hickman (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974) <http://www.ccel.org/e/edwards/works1.i.xxvi.html> (accessed November 29, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1987), 197. Apprehension by early Baptists to children experiencing baptism was accompanied by a skepticism of children experiencing conversion. McBeth writes, “Most Baptists had felt conversion should ordinarily occur in adult years and rarely younger than sixteen or eighteen. The conversion of a child as young as twelve would be considered so unusual as to be reported to the association among the ‘remarkables’ of that year.”

<sup>28</sup> Puritan Divine Richard Baxter wrote encouraging pastors to “Persuade the master of every family to cause his children and servants to repeat the Catechism to him, every Sabbath evening, and to give him some account of what they have heard at church during the day.” Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 101.

of the *Second London Confession* of 1689.<sup>29</sup> Keach paid particular attention to the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the proper administration of baptism.<sup>30</sup> Much of what is found in this catechism is borrowed from the *Westminster Catechism* with the exception of the teaching concerning baptism. Thirty years earlier, in 1664, Keach wrote a catechism, *The Child's Instructor*, that is no longer available.<sup>31</sup> It apparently did not achieve the same popular status as this later catechism.

A decade after Keach wrote his first catechism, *The Child's Instructor*, John Bunyan wrote a catechism entitled, "Instruction for the Ignorant." The purpose for his writing was to benefit three distinct groups of people. "First, he desired to remind his parishioners of the truths he taught them."<sup>32</sup> Bunyan had an evangelistic purpose to writing his catechism because the other two groups he wrote for were unconverted individuals. He wrote it for his parishioners to use as an evangelistic tract with unconverted family members. Finally, he presented it to "all those unconverted...who have been at any time under my preaching, and yet remain in their sins."<sup>33</sup> Bunyan's example reveals for us that the use of catechism does not need to be limited to children. Its value can be seen throughout the congregation spanning various levels of spiritual maturity.

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<sup>29</sup> Full text of this and other catechisms mentioned can be accessed at <http://www.reformedreader.org/ccc/bcat.htm> (accessed, November 15, 2010).

<sup>30</sup> Timothy George and Denise George, eds., *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 241-255.

<sup>31</sup> George, Introduction, *Baptist Confessions*, 17.

<sup>32</sup> John Bunyan, "Instruction for the Ignorant, Bunyan's Catechism," quoted at <http://www.reformedreader.org/ccc/bcat.htm> (accessed January 17, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> John Bunyan, "Instruction for the Ignorant, Bunyan's Catechism," quoted at <http://www.reformedreader.org/ccc/bcat.htm> (accessed January 17, 2011).

Charles Spurgeon wrote a shortened version of *Keach's Catechism* in the nineteenth-century to be used for the children in his congregation. Spurgeon was passionate about the benefit of catechism to the longevity of faith from generation to generation. He declared the following to his congregation concerning the use of the catechism:

In matters of doctrine you will find orthodox congregations frequently change to heterodoxy in the course of thirty or forty years, and it is because too often there has been no catechizing of the children in the essential doctrines of the Gospel. For my part, I am more and more persuaded that the study of a good Scriptural catechism is of infinite value to our children. Even if the youngsters do not understand all the questions and answers...yet, abiding in their memories, it will be infinite service when the time of understanding comes, to have known these very excellent, wise and judicious definitions of the things of God.<sup>34</sup>

The use of catechisms not only roots us in the historic tradition of Baptists, it hearkens back to the early church as well. In the midst of apostasy and persecution the early church recognized the need to develop methods of instructing converts for baptism in the basics of faith in Jesus Christ. With so many converts coming from radically different backgrounds and worldviews this extended time of catechesis<sup>35</sup> provided the

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<sup>34</sup> Charles Spurgeon quoted in, George, Introduction, *Baptist Confessions*, 17.

<sup>35</sup> In the early centuries of the church a convert was expected to go through a period of preparation prior to baptism that included instruction, examination, and discipline in the Christian faith. This period is believed to have lasted one to three years and was a rigorous time for the catechumen. Paul F. Bradshaw, Maxwell E. Johnson, L. Edward Phillips, and Harold W. Attridge, *The Apostolic Tradition: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002). This book offers Hippolytus' collection of early church traditions related to church order, including baptism. During the late first and early second century the church used the *Didache of the Apostles*, as the sourcebook for instructing catechumen. Packer and Parrett, *Grounded*, 53. Arnold E. Clinton provides an interesting evaluation of how these early practices can influence our current approach to spiritual formation with new believers. Clinton E. Arnold, "Early Church catechesis and New Christians' Classes in Contemporary Evangelicalism," *Journal of The Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 1 (March 1, 2004): 39-54. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 29, 2011).

church and the individual the opportunity to take these “conversions seriously and carefully, prayerfully, and intentionally”<sup>36</sup> lead the young believer through each stage.<sup>37</sup>

Catechisms were a significant part of the life of the early church but “the golden Age of catechisms emerged in the Reformation.”<sup>38</sup> Catechism had been neglected within the church to an increasing degree beginning in the fifth century.<sup>39</sup> Luther and Calvin led efforts during the Reformation to reverse this trend. They saw catechetical work as primary in the sustaining of the church. The Reformers expanded the use of catechism to also include adults, a practice that would be quite beneficial in most of our ministries today when one considers the statistics of biblical illiteracy we face.<sup>40</sup>

There are a multitude of historic catechisms to choose from that can serve as beneficial frameworks for following in the footsteps of Baptists throughout the centuries. These resources provide a framework by which we can imitate their efforts to root rising generations in the Gospel. Using one or a few of these is a great start, but the best advice

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<sup>36</sup> Packer and Parrett, *Grounded*, 22.

<sup>37</sup> Tom J. Nettles, “An Encouragement to Use Catechisms,” *Founder’s Journal*, issue 10, fall 1992, <http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/journal/fj10/article3.html> (accessed January 24, 2010).

<sup>38</sup> Nettles, “An Encouragement,” under “History Commends the Usefulness of Catechisms.”

<sup>39</sup> Packer and Parrett, *Grounded*, 51-74.

<sup>40</sup> Packer and Parrett, *Grounded*, 22-23. Research revealing the level of biblical illiteracy among Americans includes the following resources. “A Bible in the Hand Still May Not be Read,” *The Baptist Standard*, December 4, 2000, [http://www.baptiststandard.com/2000/12\\_4/pages/biblereading.html](http://www.baptiststandard.com/2000/12_4/pages/biblereading.html) (accessed November 29, 2011). “Americans Know Big Macs Better than Ten Commandments,” October 12, 2007, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2007/10/12/us-bible-commandments-idUSN1223894020071012> (accessed November 29, 2011). Gary M. Burge, “The Greatest Story Never Read,” *Christianity Today*, August 9, 1999, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/1999/august9/9t9045.html> (accessed November 29, 2011). USA Today, “America’s Biblical Illiteracy,” March 8, 2007. Ken Camp, “Bible Literacy Among Baptists in Decline, Some Educators Fear,” *The Baptist Standard*, January 6, 2006, [http://www.baptiststandard.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=4553&Itemid=134](http://www.baptiststandard.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4553&Itemid=134) (accessed November 29, 2011). George Barna, “Christians Say They Do Best at Relationships Worst in Bible Knowledge,” *Barna Update*, June 14, 2005, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/177-christians-say-they-do-best-at-relationships-worst-in-bible-knowledge?q=bible+knowledge> (accessed November 29, 2011).

for us comes from Timothy George who writes, “Every pastor and every parent should adapt or write a catechism which is useful in their own context.”<sup>41</sup> As churches and church leaders, a valuable exercise would be taking our church’s confession of faith and putting it in the form of a catechism for the whole church. Then we could challenge everyone to commit the catechism to memory in one year’s time. This exercise could precede revisiting the catechism a few times a year as a whole congregation.

The ways in which Isaac Backus utilized confessions and catechisms in his lifetime provide us with practical and tangible ways to catch a glimpse at the intangibles he passed along to others. Backus reached back into history, thereby threading the heritage of the Church through the foundation he laid for his own ministry. He thoroughly utilized the elements of church history that he believed would benefit his ministry and others. He then handed the thread of ecclesial heritage off to the next generation who would carry on at the Baptist church he planted and they have continued to faithfully build upon and add to that thread in the two hundred years since.

The accomplishments and practices evident during Backus’ lifetime are impressive. His work reveals focused efforts driven by the desire to lay a groundwork upon which future generations could build. While others have shared this aspiration, sadly their efforts have not always produced the desired results. Many within the body of Christ throughout its history have spoken of godly legacy that passes on and grows from generation to generation, but fewer have actually witnessed it as reality. In the case of Isaac Backus, not only do the years in which he lived speak to reconnecting with history for the purpose of bringing about revival and renewal in the body of Christ, but the

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<sup>41</sup> George, Introduction, *Baptist Confessions*, 16.

ministry he left behind continues to speak to a legacy that has outlived his life and multiplied.

This legacy of Isaac Backus - his life and ministry - is a treasure in itself. But the fact that his ministry has continued to grow and be full of life even to this day adds greater significance to the example he provides. His faithfulness in passing on vibrant orthodoxy to the next generations is producing greater and more lasting fruit than he may have ever imagined it could.

First Baptist Church of North Middleboro, Massachusetts,<sup>42</sup> continues to minister to its surrounding community and to the world. In the two hundreds years since Backus went to be with the Lord the church has had forty-nine pastors serve as under-shepherds of the congregation. During this time the church has also experienced three relocations. Yet in the midst of all this and other transitions that churches experience, the vibrant orthodoxy that Backus labored so faithfully to foster within the congregation has consistently been preserved and passed on. There is an unwavering legacy that can be traced throughout the entire history of the church. There has never been a point in the ministry of the church that they wavered from their biblical and Baptist roots.<sup>43</sup>

The church has faithfully passed on the essentials of the faith from generation to generation in such a way that these essentials have been expressed with all the passion they possess. The church looks quite different today than they did when Backus was the

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<sup>42</sup> Also known as Backus Memorial Baptist Church.

<sup>43</sup> All information about First Baptist Church in North Middleboro is gathered from phone conversations and email correspondence with Pastor Jason Genest, as well as information posted on the churches website, and unpublished documents provided by the Church. [www.fbcnm.org](http://www.fbcnm.org) (accessed November 1, 2011).

pastor, but the mission of the church and the way they carry out that mission are still foundationally solid.

Discipleship in the early days of the church took advantage of the benefits of the catechisms that were available. Today the discipleship of children within the church takes place primarily through the Sunday school program. Though the method has changed the motivation remains the same. The church maintains the desire to instill an “unwavering commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ,”<sup>44</sup> just as Isaac Backus and the small band of believers did who started the church so many years ago. The church believes by keeping it simple they can most effectively remain focused. “We’re not cluttered with the ‘latest and greatest.’ We’re just deeply in love with the Lord, as were those who went before us, and see personal salvation of all men as the focus, just as did Backus and his early band of Believers.”<sup>45</sup>

The church has multiplied their influence through the years by participating in the planting of other Baptist congregations and by developing and sending many pastors and missionaries onto the field. Currently, the church supports thirteen missionaries whose influence spans the globe. It is still a vibrant and solid church seeking to carry out the mission of spreading the gospel in their backyard and across the globe. The mission’s flame within the church remains a critical aspect of their ministry that generates passion for Christ within the congregation spreading outward.

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<sup>44</sup> Rev. Jason Genest, interview with Mark Simpson, written responses, Dayton, OH, November 25, 2011.

<sup>45</sup> Rev. Jason Genest, interview with Mark Simpson, written responses, Dayton, OH, November 25, 2011.

Isaac Backus' love of history remains a part of the fabric of the church. Current Pastor, Jason Genest, believes that the church has faithfully maintained the spiritual passion of Isaac Backus throughout their history. The principles and convictions that drove Isaac Backus continue to drive the congregation. These principles are being practically worked out in the church's twenty-first century context. Reverend Genest sees First Baptist Church in North Middleboro as a church that embraces their history in ways that contribute to the consistency the church has enjoyed.<sup>46</sup> The church regularly celebrates their history and their foundation. The church seeks to keep visual reminders of their history around so younger generations and newcomers will be prompted to ask questions that give opportunity for the church to share about God's faithfulness throughout the church's rich and storied history. Two examples include a painting of Isaac Backus that hangs at the rear of the sanctuary and the original gravestone that used to mark his tomb rests in the entryway of the church.<sup>47</sup>

The current generation has a strong desire to faithfully pass on what has been passed to them. With each generation that faithfully passes on their faith there appears to be a growing desire to resist being the generation that breaks the pattern. The positive pressure serves as a healthy motivation for carrying on what has been handed down. This is supported by a statement on the church's website that sums up a brief historic sketch. The church acknowledges the impossibility of knowing just how many lives the ministry has impacted. Many souls have come to know Christ and many have passed through the

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<sup>46</sup> Reverend Jason Genest, interview with Mark Simpson, phone conversation, Dayton, Ohio, November 17, 2011.

<sup>47</sup> The original headstone was moved to the church in 1893 when a new marble memorial in the shape of a pulpit was erected over his grave to "commemorate his 'zeal and industry in the cause of civil and religious liberty.'" William G. McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus and the American Pietistic Tradition* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co., 1967), 230.



church. The one thing that is certain for them is: “We have seen, and continue to see, the faithfulness and provision of Almighty God as He carries us through generations of faithful and fruitful ministry for the Sake of Jesus Christ.”<sup>48</sup> This generation enjoys the positive example of each generation since the inception of the church serving to provide them a model of how to continue the unbroken legacy of vibrant orthodoxy.

### **Principles for Passing on Our Legacy**

Isaac Backus stands as a model for Baptists who are calling for a reconnection with our religious heritage. As a Baptist himself, his significance is largely a result of his wedding of Scripture and history, thereby putting American Baptists on the map. As autonomous<sup>49</sup> bodies, we cannot mandate the establishment of this resurgence. As “People of the Book,” we want to remain true to the formal and material principles<sup>50</sup> of the Reformation that have driven Baptists for so many years. Yet there are principles we can seek to apply within our particular context that will enrich and potentially revive our congregations while further affirming those principles that make us Baptist.

These principles are for our educators, denominational leaders, and our congregations. If change is to take place and heritage is to be recaptured, it must take place at both the congregational and leadership levels. This principle within Baptist

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<sup>48</sup> See “history” page, [www.fbcnm.org](http://www.fbcnm.org) (accessed November 1, 2011).

<sup>49</sup> An examination of the modern understanding of autonomy within the church is outside the scope of this thesis; however, a thorough study of the current understanding and practice of autonomy within free churches and its alignment with the biblical witness would be a worthy research topic.

<sup>50</sup> See chapter 3, footnote 61 for an explanation of the formal principle of the reformation. *Sola Fide* is called the material principle of the Reformation because it “involves the very matter, substance, or heart of what any man or woman must understand and believe to be saved.” James Montgomery Boice, *Whatever Happened to the Gospel of Grace?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 129.

circles was clearly manifested during the conservative resurgence that took place within the Southern Baptist Convention during the late 1970s and 80s.<sup>51</sup> With this in mind, the following are some proposed principles to consider that Isaac Backus modeled within his ministry.

### Making History Relevant

Isaac Backus made the study of history relevant in his lifetime. He was able to provide history with pointed relevancy by utilizing it as a means to address the larger issues that were facing the church and society. If we are to follow his example, we too must discern how to do the same in our situation.

In a postmodern culture that values the power of narrative and story, we can utilize the stories of real-life Christians who make up our heritage. These examples of faith and practice can bring flesh to the propositions that fill our curricula, periodicals, and messages. We can teach doctrine through their lives while acknowledging their humanity through studying their victories and failures. Ultimately we can highlight how God worked in all things.

History has become dry and irrelevant for so many because it has been taught as lists of names and dates with little or no connection to real flesh and bone. We must

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<sup>51</sup> For a detailed account of the events that took place in the Southern Baptist Convention during this time see, James C. Hefley, *The Truth in Crisis: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention*, Vol. 6 (Garland, TX: Hannibal, 2005), provides a conservative viewpoint. Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation: The Conservative Resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000), also provides a conservative viewpoint. Joe Edward Barnhart, *The Southern Baptist Holy War: The Self-Destructive Struggle for Power within the Largest Protestant Denomination in America* (Austin, TX: Texas Monthly Press, 1986), provides a moderate perspective. David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dissent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), provides a broader historical overview. Walter B. Shurden, *Not a Silent People: Controversies that have Shaped Southern Baptists* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1972). This work provides a look at the some of the key controversies that have filled Southern Baptist history.

realize that we are not teaching for test-taking purposes but for life-change. Therefore, the more we can use biographies, the stories of changed lives, and heroes of the faith throughout history the more we can revive an appreciation for, and perhaps even a passion to know, those who have gone before us and made so much headway in issues we face today.

Isaac Backus provides us with an important example of how the life of a historic individual can be relevant to the questions that interest younger evangelicals. For many younger evangelicals the issue of injustice and how to erase it in its various forms is prominent in their minds. Much of what drives these younger evangelicals on this quest mirrors the convictions and issues that drove Backus in his quest for religious liberty. By sharing the life of Isaac Backus with these young men and women we can convict, educate, and help them to build upon the legacy left by such a great Baptist forefather.

As we revive the historic documents of the church as stones of remembrance for upcoming generations we must also revive the stories connected to them. These stories, like those found in the pages of Scripture, illuminate the glorious deeds of the Lord, of His might, and the wonders He has done throughout history. They reveal that God did not cease working miraculously in and on behalf of His people at the conclusion of biblical history. He has continued to work mightily throughout the history of the church and will continue to do so in future generations. Creeds, confessions, and catechisms are so much more than doctrine. “For as the voice of our spiritual ancestry, they convey not only the matter of Christian doctrine but the sense [Christians] had of the majesty, thrill, and quickening power of that truth.”<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Robert S. Rayburn, “Biblical and Pastoral Basis for Creeds and Confessions,” *Premise* vol.III, number 3, March 29, 1996, <http://www.reformedreader.org/bpcc.htm> (accessed September, 30, 2010).

These stories give flesh and life to dead orthodoxy. They are stories that must be told because they show the sovereignty and providence of God in preserving truth and His Church. The stories and the documents become pillars that hold one another up and help us remember - a practice upon which God places a high premium in Scripture.<sup>53</sup>

With each life stage of the church, we have at our disposal a wellspring of relevant material for spiritual formation. Each era of the church possesses the common thread of God's faithful work and yet each stage is unique in the lessons it can teach us. The ancient creeds of the church provide us with a connection to the church in infancy and adolescence. They reveal to us groups of people who were wrestling from within to hold fast and preserve the faith once and for all passed on to the saints as they struggled to discern the source of God's revelation. They prayerfully sought the mind of Christ concerning which teachings being spread were true and which were heresy. They did so depending on the indwelling presence of Jesus Christ and they did it together. Their legacy, though far from perfect, has given us the roots to claim the ultimate authority of Scripture.

The collection of confessions and catechisms produced by Baptists and other groups from whom the Baptists borrowed provide us with peeks into the lives and stories of pioneer Baptists and their culture. They reveal individuals and groups, just like us, who had a desire to see the gospel spread to every tribe, tongue, and nation. They reveal these same people seeking to follow hard after God and be honorable vessels through whom God brought His kingdom on earth. They uncover the rudiments of people who,

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<sup>53</sup> Genesis 31:50, Exodus 20:8, 32:13, Numbers 15:40, Deuteronomy 4:10, 5:15, 7:18, 8:2, 18, 9:27, 15:15, 16:3, 16:12, 24:9, 24:18, 22, 32:7, Joshua 1:13, 1 Chronicles 16:12, Isaiah 46:9, Malachi 4:4, John 15:20, Ephesians 2:11, are just a few examples. Many more could be listed.

though far from perfect, were humbly seeking to work out their salvation with fear and trembling while God was working in them.<sup>54</sup> They also uncover the continuity we share with other Reformation branches, each sharing these desires. Though there was much division and abuse going on during the time surrounding the Reformation, throughout all branches of Christianity, Protestant as well as Catholic, there was also much that was agreed upon.<sup>55</sup> By looking at both the things that caused division and the things that were common ground, we can learn more about our history and how to forge forward in our own challenges alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ. We may not see entirely eye to eye with these brothers and sisters, but we agree upon the essential doctrines of the faith.<sup>56</sup> History provides us with this framework. Though it is ancient it is strikingly relevant.

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<sup>54</sup> Philippians 2:12-13.

<sup>55</sup> For additional reading see, Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2000). Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1988).

<sup>56</sup> "In Essentials Unity, In Non-Essentials Liberty, In All Things Charity." "This famous motto of Christian Irenics, which I have slightly modified in the text, is often falsely attributed to St. Augustin (whose creed would not allow it, though his heart might have approved of it), but is of much later origin. It appears for the first time in Germany, A.D. 1627 and 1628, among peaceful divines of the Lutheran and German Reformed churches, and found a hearty welcome among moderate divines In England. The authorship has recently been traced to RUPERTUS MELDENIUS, an otherwise unknown divine, and author of a remarkable tract in which the sentence first occurs. He gave classical expression to the irenic sentiments of such divines as Calixtus of Helmstadt, David Pareus of Heidelberg, Crocius of Marburg, John Valentin Andreae of Wuerttemberg, John Arnd of Zelle, Georg Frank of Francfort-on-the-Oder, the brothers Bergius in Brandenburg, and of the indefatigable traveling evangelist of Christian union, John Dury, and Richard Baxter. The tract of Meldenius bears the title, *Paraenesis votiva pro Pace Ecclesiae ad Theologos Augustanae Confessionis, Auctore Ruperto Meldenio Theologo*, 62 pp. in 4to, without date and place of publication. It probably appeared in 1627 at Francfort-on-the-Oder, which was at that time the seat of theological moderation. Mr. C. R. Gillett (librarian of the Union Theological Seminary) informs me that the original copy, which he saw in Berlin, came from the University of Francfort-on-the-Oder after its transfer to Breslau." Steven Perisho, comment on "A Common Quotation from Augustine," <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/jod/augustine/quote.html> (accessed, January 4, 2011).

## Living Theology

The last thing any of us want for ourselves or our children is a dead faith. We want vitality. We want passion. We want depth and meaning. Yet, it seems these things fluctuate in our lives and often barely flicker in the lives of those who are third- or later-generation Christians. This is where the assistance of creeds, confessions, and catechisms may be of service. “Creeds give expression to the living connection between contemporary Christians and their spiritual ancestry.”<sup>57</sup> Confessions and catechisms possess this same potential. This living connection is severely lacking in Christianity today. It is a connection we desperately need to reestablish. Robert Rayburn advocates creeds and confessions as tools to help reestablish this living connection. He writes, “Creeds and confessions are the voices of the church’s past. They are a distillation of the church’s discoveries of the meaning and the implications of the truth as God has revealed it in Holy Scripture and confirmed it in the experience and the conscience of his people.” He later adds, “They are the witness our fathers bear to us across the ages regarding what they considered to be of supreme importance and essential to be conveyed to the rising generations.”<sup>58</sup> Mark Sarver reinforces the sentiments of Rayburn, “Creeds give us the fruit, not just of one preacher’s labors, but of the combined labors of hundreds of men over hundreds of years.”<sup>59</sup>

It is critical we remember and exemplify the reality that as a religious community we must be able to articulate and embody our common life. Part of that common life is

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<sup>57</sup> Rayburn, “Biblical and Pastoral Basis for Creeds and Confessions.”

<sup>58</sup> Rayburn, “Biblical and Pastoral Basis for Creeds and Confessions.”

<sup>59</sup> Mark Sarver, “The Legitimacy and Function of Creeds,” <http://www.reformedreader.org/lfc/htm> (accessed October 21, 2009).

the fact that Christianity grew out of Judaism. These Hebrew roots must not be forgotten, for when they are, much of our heritage is incorrectly interpreted. Judaism has a confessional orientation that harkens back to the covenants found in the Old Testament made between God and the nation of Israel. These covenants were central to Judaism.<sup>60</sup> The covenants were reminders to the people of Israel of their living relationship with the One True God. It is from these roots that the Christian community, and later Baptists, inherited its confessional nature.<sup>61</sup>

Our common life also includes roots from every age of the church. It is rooted in the early church in which much of our information concerning its development can be found in the pages of the New Testament with supplements in documents like the *Didache* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*. It is also rooted in the Patristic Age in which we benefit from the information provided through Church Councils and the Apostolic Fathers. Additionally we enjoy roots in the Reformation and the writings of various Reformers.

We must be able to articulate our common life in ways that capture its inherent richness. Looking across the entire spectrum of church history makes this task appear daunting, tedious, and mundane. However, by looking at manageable portions of Church history through the lens of the history and theology found in the pages of Scripture, we stand a better chance of capturing the richness of our heritage. Doing so reveals that the

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<sup>60</sup> The Shema is a powerful example of the covenant nature of the nation of Israel. This statement found in Deuteronomy 6:4-6 was taught from infancy to death and adherence to it as part of the community was expected. During Jesus earthly ministry when asked what was the greatest commandment his response was to recite the Shema. The response of the religious teacher asking the question was not shock or anger but affirmation that what Jesus said was indeed the truth. Mark 12:28-33.

<sup>61</sup> Glenn E. Hinson, "Confessions or Creeds in Early Christian Tradition." *Review & Expositor* 76, no. 1 (December 1, 1979): 5-16. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed December 8, 2010).

church possesses a living theology that breaths with each generation. In our confessional heritage we find that the church in nearly every generation has sought to articulate their common life in the language of their cultures without compromising their biblical foundation. As with the example of the Reformers, the desire is not to replace the history that has been passed on in the form of creeds, confessions, and catechisms and the stories that go with them, but to effectively communicate them and build upon them.

Scripture teaches that we are redeemed into a community called the church. This community is made up of believers past, present, and future. We cannot grow into full maturity if we choose to isolate ourselves from this community and pursue our faith in Jesus Christ only as individuals. God's Word simply does not permit us to advocate such an approach to the Christian faith.<sup>62</sup> With this realization, we "should crave the opportunity of communion across the centuries with those who have experienced the full force and glory of any particular truth revealed in Holy Scripture."<sup>63</sup> Creeds and confessions are certainly not the only means to promote this communion; however, they are "the most authoritative and deliberate account of that historical and corporate experience of truth."<sup>64</sup>

Many have witnessed dead orthodoxy and a lifeless shell of religion that has resulted from rote use of church tradition. This has resulted in aversion to creeds, confessions, and catechisms for fear they will turn people away from the faith. However, when these resources are wedded with Scripture, the combination has the power to be the

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<sup>62</sup> See John 13:34, 35; 15:10-12; 17:23; Acts 2:44; Romans 15:7; 1 Corinthians 12:13, 25; Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 John 4:11-12; 1 Peter 2:4-5.

<sup>63</sup> Rayburn, "Biblical and Pastoral Basis for Creeds and Confessions."

<sup>64</sup> Rayburn, "Biblical and Pastoral Basis for Creeds and Confessions."



groundwork for a passionate and living faith. There is always a danger that dead orthodoxy will result. In all fairness though, it must be observed that the same could be said for the faith of those who have animosity for the use of these documents within the discipleship of the church. Current statistics revealing the exodus from churches and the reasons for it are no respecter of denomination or methodology; they run the gamut.<sup>65</sup>

Kevin DeYoung has captured this reality well. He writes, “What starts out as new and precious becomes plain and old. What begins as thrilling discovery becomes rote exercise. What provokes one generation to sacrifice and passion becomes in the next generation a cause for rebellion and apathy.”<sup>66</sup> This does not have to be the case. Each generation needs to take the journey of discovering the richness of the faith handed to them, recognizing that the task of forming Christians is ongoing. This journey requires a combination of guidance from generations who have already been down the road of discovery and independent exploration on the part of the budding generation. This combination allows each generation to discover living theology that breathes with them and poignantly penetrates the questions that are most pressing to their lives. Such a journey keeps the old, old story new and precious.

Like the stones from the midst of the Jordan River, creeds, confessions, and catechisms offer tangible remembrances along the journey. Their propositional truth provides anchors along the journey of discovery. The stories surrounding them can ignite curiosity and persistence along the journey. These documents are certainly not the only

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<sup>65</sup> Thom S. Rainer and Sam S. Rainer III, *Essential Church?* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2008), Thom S. Rainer, *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001). Both of these books provide statistics concerning church drop-outs that are from a variety of denominations.

<sup>66</sup> Kevin DeYoung, *The Good News We Almost Forgot: Rediscovering the Gospel in a 16<sup>th</sup> Century Catechism* (Moody, Chicago, IL: 2010), 13.

tools at our disposal for promoting multigenerational faith connections, but they have been neglected ones for many Baptists that if revived could help transform the future of our denomination.

### Reuniting Proposition and Story

The beauty of these documents, i.e. creeds, confessions, and catechisms, is that they provide something for everyone. As we dive in, what we find is the unity of proposition and story. We must intentionally wed the two making the most of their ability to foster vibrancy and orthodoxy in our faith.

These resources, like many of our hymns, meaningful as they are in themselves, become far more meaningful to us when we connect with the backstory. Take the timeless hymns *Amazing Grace*<sup>67</sup> and *It Is Well with My Soul*<sup>68</sup> as examples. Both are songs familiar to even the most infrequent church attender. They have soothed many a troubled heart even without the story behind the song. Explaining John Newton's and Horatio Spafford's motivations for writing these beloved songs can exponentially affect the power of the songs.

*Amazing Grace* was written by John Newton, a man who lost his mother as a child. A short time later, he joined the crew of his father's merchant ship at the age of eleven. He went from there to a warship from which he deserted. When he was recaptured, he was flogged as punishment and then fell deeper into a life of rebellion and

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<sup>67</sup> John Newton, "Amazing Grace" (no. 330) in *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1991).

<sup>68</sup> Horatio Spafford, "It is Well with My Soul" (no. 410) in *The Baptist Hymnal* (Nashville, TN: Convention Press, 1991).

debauchery. Newton served as a ship captain at the helm of a slave ship. The ship was filled with all forms of inhuman acts. After all this Newton was radically converted at sea and became a pastor and activist against the slave trade.

This testimony sheds a whole new light on the grace that we sing about. This hard-hearted infidel who spent much of his life running full speed from God described himself as “once an infidel and Libertine, as servant of slavers in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the Faith he had long labored to destroy.”<sup>69</sup> It is relatively easy to see why such a man would use the adjective “amazing” to describe God’s grace.

Horatio Spafford’s story is every bit as revealing and moving. The lyrics of *It Is Well with My Soul* were written at sea near the location where he lost his four daughters to drowning. Only his wife was spared in the tragedy. As Spafford passed by the approximate location of their death, he was overwhelmed with the peace of God and wrote the words of the song. To find the kind of peace Spafford found while in the midst of his grief gives a tangible hope that in our darkest hour we, too, will find in God the ability to say, “It is well!” What quickly becomes apparent from these stories is that these are more than just words; they are testimonies of the character of God in the midst of life’s realities.

Each of the Creeds of the Early Church is filled with moving stories as well, though fewer and fewer Christians have even a cursory knowledge of these stories. Imagine the potential for an elderly deacon to find renewed vision for instilling his faith in God in another through the story of Alexander of Alexandria and the young

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<sup>69</sup> Inscription on John Newton’s tombstone in the parish churchyard in Olney, England. Quoted in, Kenneth W. Osbeck, *101 Hymn Stories* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1982), 28.

Athanasius. Alexander could have never imagined that Athanasius would play such a crucial role in the touting of the full deity and full humanity of Jesus Christ.<sup>70</sup> Neither could Valerius have fully known that taking Augustine of Hippo under his charge would result in the development of the one the greatest theologians the Church has ever known.<sup>71</sup>

The history of the Council of Nicaea, which produced the forerunner of the Nicene Creed, provides us with a story that can help redeem the story of Santa Claus as well. Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, is believed by some to provide the historic origin for the legend of Santa Claus. Nicholas was known as a generous man who loved children. The Council of Nicea brought together approximately 300 church leaders from across the Roman Empire, including Nicholas. The Council convened in part to resolve the debate over the deity of Jesus Christ. Nicholas was a staunch believer in the necessity of the belief that Jesus is fully God and fully man. He was so passionate about this that while Arius, the key spokesman for the opposing view, was speaking Nicholas became so enraged that he walked up to Arius and slapped him in the face.<sup>72</sup> This full story of

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<sup>70</sup> For an overview of Athanasius and his relationship with Alexander Bishop of Alexandria see the introduction of, Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>71</sup> For an overview of Augustine and his relationship with Valerius see chapter three of, Edward L. Smither, *Augustine as Mentor* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2009).

<sup>72</sup> It was illegal for Nicholas to slap Arius. Some accounts report that he was stripped of his position and placed in jail but was later reinstated to his position as Bishop of Myra when he asked forgiveness and Arius and his followers were defeated. The authenticity of the account is debatable. The information we possess about Saint Nicholas is sketchy and the account of Eusebius regarding the Council of Nicea does not include any information about Nicholas being in attendance or slapping Arius. Though it is possible that, if he was stripped of his position and thrown in prison, his name may have been removed from the records. The following provide an overview of the information surrounding the life of Nicholas. The Saint Nicholas Center provides a great deal of information include primary sources, <http://www.stnicholascenter.org/pages/home/> (Accessed November 29, 2011). Joe Wheeler, *Saint Nicholas* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2010). D. L. Cann, *Saint Nicholas, Bishop of Myra: The Life and Times of the Original Father Christmas* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2002).

Nicholas, Bishop of Myra, and the Council of Nicea can beautifully bring together the incarnation story and the story of Santa in a way that points our children to the message of Christmas in language they can understand and will likely not soon forget.

We have seen some of the stories of Isaac Backus and other framers of confessions, but the resources available are virtually endless and the stories are fascinating. Just the mention of some of the names of the men behind our confessions become points of reference that can prompt questions in our children. What child would not be intrigued to know more about individuals with names like Balthasar Hubmaier, Menno Simons, or Huldreich Zwingli?<sup>73</sup> The life of Luther and the story of the *95 Theses* provide us with a historical connection that can make Halloween about so much more than candy, and his debate with Huldreich Zwingli over the Lord's Supper can bring to life for our entire church our particular beliefs concerning the nature of the elements used during the sacrament.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Balthasar Hubmaier was the theological leader during the early years of the Anabaptists who was martyred for his refusal to recant his belief in believer's baptism. For more information about Balthasar Hubmaier see, Henry C. Vedder, *Balthasar Hübmaier, the Leader of the Anabaptists* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1905). Menno Simons was the leader of the Anabaptists after the death of Balthasar Hubmaier. He is the most prolific writer among the Dutch Anabaptists. For more information see, James K. Stein, *Spiritual Guides for the 21st Century: Faith Stories of the Protestant Reformers* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2000). A helpful resource for children and teenagers to introduce them to Menno Simons in novel form is, Myron S. Augsburger, *The Fugitive: Menno Simons, Spiritual Leader in the Free Church Movement* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2008). Huldreich Zwingli was the leader of the Swiss Reformation and mentor to Balthasar Hubmaier and Menno Simons along with a few other leaders within the Anabaptist movement. For more information about Zwingli see, G. R. Potter, *Zwingli* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

<sup>74</sup> Luther's 95 theses were posted on the castle door in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517, the eve of All Saint's Day, Halloween 1517. The theses were written against the sale of indulgences by the Catholic Church. Though composed by Luther in Latin for clergy and professors they were almost immediately translated into German and distributed throughout Germany. This act by Luther is considered to have sparked the beginning of the period known as the Reformation in church history. Luther and Zwingli differed on the understanding of the nature of the elements in the Lord's Supper. Luther believed that Christ is present in the elements whereas Zwingli saw the elements as symbols of the body of Christ. The two differed sharply when they met at Marburg to discuss this in 1529. Though they agreed on 24 or 25 points (14 of 15 major points), they still remained skeptical of one another and unable to sustain more than

Even in the recent past we have the stories that surround the Southern Baptist Convention and the framing of the *Baptist Faith and Message*.<sup>75</sup> Not many individuals within Baptist congregations have a cursory understanding of what is found in the *Baptist Faith and Message*.<sup>76</sup> Not many know the story behind the revisions that have taken place, and truthfully there is probably little interest in doing an in-depth study of every article found in the document. However, if we combine our study with the lives and legacies of men like John Leland, William Bullein Johnson, James Petigru Boyce, E. Y. Mullins, George Washington Truett, W. A. Criswell, Adrian Rogers, Jerry Vines, and Paige Patterson, we can bring these propositions to life.<sup>77</sup>

The more we can connect the stories of our forefathers and foremothers with the propositions that they have handed down to us, the more we will reverse the trend of believing history is irrelevant and boring. This is not a proposition that a revitalized reconnection with our past is a magic bullet; however, it is a step in the right direction. “No doubt, the church in the West has many new things to learn. But for the most part, everything we need to learn is what we’ve already forgotten.”<sup>78</sup> The pursuit of a deep and

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a shaky friendship. James M. Kittleson, *Luther the Reformer* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 106-109, 197-227.

<sup>75</sup> There are still some of the men alive who served on the committees for revisions to the Baptist Faith and Message 1963 and 2000. It has been a blessing to have recently had the opportunity to sit down with Mr. Walter R. Davis, who served on the committee of the 1963 revisions. His stories are fascinating and help to put flesh to the Southern Baptist Confession of Faith.

<sup>76</sup> Even fewer realize there are various versions of the Baptist Faith and Message (1925, 1963, 2000). In the author’s experience only a handful of people throughout the time I have ministered in Southern Baptist Churches have actually taken the time to read the Baptist Faith and Message that was put forth as the Statement of Faith for the particular local church.

<sup>77</sup> Emir and Ergun Caner, *The Sacred Trust: Sketches of the Southern Baptist Convention Presidents* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2003). This resource provides a nice short overview of the lives of each of these men listed.

<sup>78</sup> DeYoung, *Good News*, 13.

vibrant faith may well be most accessible not by looking for the new but rather in remembering the old. “We must remember the old, old story. We must remember the faith once delivered to the saints. We must remember the truths that spark reformation, revival, and regeneration.”<sup>79</sup>

As current generations are introduced to these stories of God’s work among his people, we must encourage them to add their own stories to the immense library at our disposal. Our challenge is to mine the riches of both so that followers of Christ can rejoice in the past and present work of God in His people helping build our confidence that His work will continue into the future.

### **Imparting Biblical Worldview**

We must consider utilizing creeds, confessions, and catechisms that subordinate to Scripture and place Scriptural truths in forms that summarize and simplify the process of committing a biblical worldview to memory. One Baptist author has written that “catechism is merely basic instruction in Christian doctrine using questions and answers. The goal of catechism is to impart biblical theology.”<sup>80</sup> Biblical theology is the foundation for biblical worldview. When a biblical worldview is committed to memory, it will be much more likely to transform the way in which one lives. According to Romans 12:2, we are transformed by the renewing of our minds. The above author has also observed, “Without catechism our discipleship is reduced to a list of moralisms.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> DeYoung, *Good News*, 13.

<sup>80</sup> Voddie Baucham Jr., *Family Driven Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 119.

<sup>81</sup> Baucham, *Family*, 119.

Research for several decades has revealed the power of moralism is weak among our younger generations who are continually bombarded with moral relativism.<sup>82</sup> By utilizing these resources, we expand our evangelical arsenal so that we can provide followers of Jesus Christ with a biblical framework that connects the truths of the gospel and how to live. This makes our faith a relevant reality rather than a dusty relic consisting of a tired list of what we can and can not do.

Within our homes, our churches, and our denominational literature, we need to express our appreciation for what our Baptist forefathers, foremothers, and the ancient church have provided for us by acknowledging it and using it appropriately. This may require taking these ancient sources and putting them in new forms, retaining the heart of the resource but putting it in a relevant form that connects with our audience. But in order to do this, we must first understand our ecclesiastical history. Thomas C. Oden has rightly written of our complex Christian history, “In each new developing historical situation, believers have come to discover, reformulate, and restate in their own language the unchanging revealed Word.”<sup>83</sup> By engaging in this rigorous exercise each generation has reaped the reward. Oden continues, “These ever new formulations of each new period of the tradition’s reflection about revelation continue to live out of Scripture.”<sup>84</sup> Not every church will be comfortable with or will need to recite the Apostle’s Creed in worship services, but providing the church with knowledge of the Apostle’s Creed and

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<sup>82</sup> 2002 Report of the Southern Baptist Council on Family Life, <http://www.sbcanualmeeting.net/sbc02/newsroom/newspage.asp?ID=261> (accessed November 15, 2009).

<sup>83</sup> Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 178.

<sup>84</sup> Oden, *Classic Christianity*, 178.



how it came to be beneficial for spiritual growth is consistent with the Baptist desire to grow disciples while allowing the autonomous functioning of each local congregation.

These suggestions go beyond the scope of what Isaac Backus did in his life and times with his usage of history, but they remain within the same contextual framework. Throughout his life Backus utilized his study of history to advance the Kingdom of God. Early after his conversion, this entailed the evaluation of the Puritan myth and its reality fading among the Congregationalists but heating up in the Baptist church. Later on in life his focus shifted to the question of the relationship between the church and society for revival and renewal.

Ultimately, what we need today are modern leaders who are cut from the same cloth as Isaac Backus and who recognize the value of history to our current situation to bring about the Kingdom of God. We need individuals and movements who will say with Backus

The experience of mankind, from age to age, gives the best light to direct our ways of any human means; and the record of the word of God is our only sure guide to eternal life. Comparing spiritual things with spiritual, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, is the way to bring us to that happy end; and though the writings of all uninspired men are imperfect, yet by comparing their various accounts together, we may gain much instruction from them about the accomplishments of prophecy, and many other things.<sup>85</sup>

Each classroom session depicted in the movie *Dead Poet's Society* provides John Keating with another opportunity to instruct and inspire his students. In one of these scenes Keating recites a Walt Whitman poem. He recites in the context of sharing the things that bring passion to live, the things we live for, that keep us alive. In this context he recites part of the poem "Oh me! Oh Life!" which ends with the line, "What good

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<sup>85</sup> Backus, *Your Baptist Heritage*, 17.

amid these, O me, O life? Answer. That you are here—that life exists, and identity; that the powerful play goes on, and you will contribute a verse.”<sup>86</sup> Each of us will contribute a verse to this powerful play of life. What will your verse be? Will it be a verse that contributes to awakening a vibrant orthodoxy in generations to come? Will you root your verse in the verses that have gone before you? Will you intentionally seek to pass your passionate and rooted faith on to others and inspire within them a conviction to do the same? If so, your name may be forgotten to the pages of history and your face may never grace the front of a coin or a bill, but your legacy will live on and multiply more than you can possibly imagine.

Isaac Backus sucked the marrow out of his faith. He seized the day such that the fruit of his faith continues to reverberate in this current generation. If you lean in and listen to his legacy you can hear him whispering, “Carpe...Carpe, carpe diem...Seize the day, make your life and faith extraordinary.”

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<sup>86</sup> Walt Whitman, “O Me! O Life!” *Leaves of Grass*, Philadelphia: David McKay, [c1900]; Bartleby.com, 1999. [www.bartleby.com/142/](http://www.bartleby.com/142/) (accessed November 18, 2011).

## CHAPTER 6

### NEW WINESKINS

Neither is new wine put into old wineskins. If it is, the skins burst and the wine is spilled and the skins are destroyed. But new wine is put into fresh wineskins, and so both are preserved.

-Matthew 9:17 ESV

Many things have changed since I was a child growing up in the 1970s. In those days I rode between my grandma and grandpap on the bench seat of their pickup truck and listened to the melodic sounds of Bobby Vinton streaming from the eight-track player mounted under the dash right in front of me. Now my children ride in the back seat of our five-star safety-rated sedan while we listen to Justin Bieber through an iPhone that is remotely connected to the car stereo via Bluetooth with voice activation capabilities. Only time will tell what things will be like when my children have children. One thing is certain - what is the latest and greatest in innovation today will be the dinosaur of tomorrow.

Established churches tend to gravitate to the dinosaurs rather than the innovations. They often run the risk of operating as if frozen in time. Many churches today are struggling because they are trying to relate to an iPhone world with an eight-track approach. The problem is that as great as the eight-track may be it is essentially irrelevant to the world in which we live. Both the eight-track and the iPhone carry the message of music and, though the message is not irrelevant when carried in the eight-track, that message will seldom make it to the ears of those who need to hear it now, if the packaging does not change.

The eight-track and the iPhone offer a tangible example of the refrain, “methods are many, principles are few. Methods always change, principles never do.”<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, methods can become the things that never change and, thereby, make the principles they carry appear lifeless and stagnant. When this happens within the church, we take the life-changing message of the gospel of Jesus Christ and entomb it in the vestiges of our methods.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus addressed this in Matthew 9. As he was speaking of the gospel, he referred to the need for new wine to be stored in new wineskins. Old wineskins were brittle because the leather from which they were made had lost its elasticity with use. Putting new wine in these old wineskins would lead to disaster because the new wine would expand as it fermented. Old wineskins could not handle the stretching and would burst. The message is clear: the unchanging message of the gospel is too dynamic to be transferred through old and brittle methods. Rather, the methods must remain fresh and relevant to the world in which we live and communicate the gospel, just as it did during Jesus’ day. The gospel is always fresh and new in its timelessness; therefore, it must be continually packaged and presented in fresh and relevant ways that accommodate it without changing it.

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<sup>1</sup> Warren Wiersbe, “Principles are the Bottom Line,” *Leadership*, January 1, 1980, <http://www.ctlibrary.com/le/1980/winter/8011081.html> (accessed November 14, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> David Wells and others, like Neil Postman, argue that the essential theological framework of the Christian faith is in danger of experiencing alteration by certain aspects of our postmodern world, like technology. Wells develops his understanding of this in a series of four books, David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth, or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993). David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994). David F. Wells, *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998). David F. Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

As we process how to genuinely live out our faith and pass it on to succeeding generations, we must prayerfully consider models that contextualize our heritage, preserving the gospel so that it can fill the new wineskins of each generation. Several principles have been shared throughout this paper that offer a guide for ministries interested in embarking on this journey. The historic example of Isaac Backus has been presented as a model of these principles lived out in practical ways. This final chapter presents and develops three key convictions necessary to developing a ministry that is a gift to coming generations of believers. These convictions are: view church history as part of our family tree; view culture as a vessel to transmit the gospel; and view catechism as a means of intentional discipleship.

### **View Church History as Part of Our Family Tree**

Isaac Backus teaches us the potential power of utilizing history for Kingdom purposes. One way for churches today to tap in to the power of heritage is through adopting a biblically faithful family philosophy of ministry that treats our history like a spiritual family tree. By regarding the Church as our spiritual family<sup>3</sup> we can promote a desire for connections within the Body of Christ that span the geographic, ethnic, denominational, and historic spectra.

This means we work at incorporating elements into our ministry that intentionally make connections with the abundant branches of our spiritual family tree. Intentionally

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<sup>3</sup> The metaphor of family for the Church is a pervasive metaphor in the New Testament. Brother (and sister is implied) is used over fifty times in the New Testament letters in reference to Christians. Romans 8:29 and Hebrews 2:10-18 reveal Jesus as our older brother. We become children of God and co-heirs with Jesus Christ through faith in Jesus Christ. The Fatherhood of God is constantly in view (Romans 8:16-17; Galatians 3:26-4:7).

developing these family connections encourages the ongoing bond with our spiritual family tree that helps root our belief in the faith once for all passed down to the saints. We can nurture an appreciation and respect for our history by elevating connections within our spiritual family, beginning with the closest and most prominent then working outward to our ancient predecessors.

### The Natural and Spiritual Family Connection

The chances that future generations will appreciate and honor their spiritual heritage increase greatly with a strong connection to a local church.<sup>4</sup> The healthier the relationship between the home and the church the more likely it is that a young person will possess a desire to connect with the rest of their spiritual family tree. The home is the environment where discipleship primarily takes place.<sup>5</sup> Parents are the primary influencers, spiritually and otherwise, of their children.<sup>6</sup> A local church that supports and encourages this role takes a significant step in implanting within their membership a growing appreciation for other connections within the family tree. George Barna notes, “The greatest influence a church may have in affecting children is by impacting their parents.”<sup>7</sup> Churches can encourage this by partnering with parents, providing a support

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<sup>4</sup> The Barna Group, “Adults Who Attended Church As Children Show Lifelong Effects,” November 5, 2001, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/62-adults-who-attended-church-as-children-show-lifelong-effects?q=church+attendance> (accessed December 8, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Kurt Bruner and Steve Stroepe, *It Starts at Home* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2010), 17. See also, Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

<sup>6</sup> Steve Wright, *A Parent Privilege* (Wake Forest, NC: InQuest, 2008), 17-26.

<sup>7</sup> George Barna, *Revolutionary Parenting* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2010), xvii.

system that helps equip them for the task of discipleship, and encouraging them in their task while reinforcing in their children what is being learned at home.

### *The Ministry of Equipping*

As churches, we must go beyond simply professing that the home is the primary environment for discipleship and, instead, equip parents and families with the tools necessary to accomplish this task.<sup>8</sup> “The home is responsible for training children, but the church is responsible for equipping parents in how to train their children.”<sup>9</sup> Churches today are filled with families of all shapes and sizes. Families range from a home comprised of a father and a mother raising children they birthed together, blended homes with a father and mother and children from previous marriages, single parents filling the role of both parents for their children, and an array of varieties within these categories. Most Christian parents do not lack the desire to raise their children in the care and instruction of the Lord. Instead, they feel under-equipped to accomplish the task of discipleship before them.

This is not a new challenge within the Church. Parents have struggled with their insecurity related to discipleship for generations. The church’s answer in the recent past has been to provide parents with professional clergy to assume the primary discipleship role for children and adolescents. This remedy tends to perpetuate the problem instead of fixing it because it addresses the symptom but not the sickness. Each generation spends

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<sup>8</sup> Steve Wright believes, “It is clear that the primary task of discipling children falls on parents, and I believe that the church must take its equipping role.” Wright, *A Parent Privilege*, 107.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Clark, Joanne Brubaker, and Roy Zuck, *Childhood Education in the Church* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1986), 33.

most of its time in segregation from other generations encouraging strong peer relationships but removing environments that encourage intergenerational relationships.<sup>10</sup>

Churches that commit to equipping parents for the process of discipleship address the sickness rather than the symptom. The beauty of this approach is that it encourages intergenerational interaction. It does not require that a church have additional professional staff members, though someone who focuses on family equipping can be helpful. Most churches already possess at least some of the resources necessary for equipping parents. If there are men and women who have raised or are still raising children, are a key resource for the task of equipping parents. Peers who are navigating the same child-rearing waters as others within the congregation can provide support for one another. Camaraderie can go a long way in helping parents successfully pilot the trials and tribulations of raising God-fearing children. These kinds of relationships help parents realize they are not alone as they share similar struggles and brainstorm together along the journey.

Veteran parents who have experienced parenting challenges, can be a great source of wisdom for families. When approached with humility, the benefit of these relationships is immeasurable as families gain access to a wellspring of field-tested knowledge. This kind of intergenerational interaction is a microcosm of the kind of relationships desired with the ancestry of the church.

Churches can aid in equipping parents by seeing everything that is done and taught through the lens of transferability to the home. This provides parents with constant discipleship material. Parents who are serious about equipping their children have

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Renfro, Brandon Shields, and Jay Strother, *Perspectives on Family Ministry: 3 Views*, ed. Timothy Paul Jones (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2009), 22-25.



abundant resources and a variety of places from which to launch into discipleship. When parents are equipped with their children at hand, it provides an environment that more closely reflects the real world environment parents regularly face. These family learning environments allow parents to work together to learn how to teach spiritual lessons in the midst of the frenzy of family life. By witnessing how each family handles this in the midst of discipleship together, families learn from one another in a safe environment that gives permission for families to be families. At the same time the material is designed to address the insecurities and concerns parents have as they face the amazing task of leading their children in their spiritual journey.

### *The Ministry of Encouragement*

Families are under attack in our culture. It is challenging enough to raise children when both parents are present and exhibit healthy levels of maturity. The task becomes increasingly overwhelming when one parent is absent, physically or otherwise, or when parents operate from personal dysfunction and unhealthy habits. Parents and grandparents crave the right equipment for the task, but there is also a desperate need for encouragement. Now more than ever parents need encouragement in the process of spiritually influencing their children. Perhaps no ministry is more important to the partnering of the natural and spiritual family than the ministry of encouragement.

The author of Hebrews exalts the place of encouragement among believers as we gather together when he writes, “And let us consider how to stir one another up to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together...but encouraging one another, and all

the more as you see the Day drawing near.”<sup>11</sup> If we genuinely believe that one of the greatest tasks given to parents is to raise their children in the care and instruction of the Lord, then the church should be intentionally and consistently encouraging parents to fully embrace that role. With each day that passes we inch ever closer to the Day when Jesus Christ will return; therefore, our encouragement should noticeably increase as time passes. Paul writes to the Romans that our God is “the God of endurance and encouragement.”<sup>12</sup> A church that encourages parents reflects the character of God.

The encouragement a church provides for parents accomplishes many things but two in particular are worthy of note. When the church encourages parents in their task as spiritual influencers of their children, it can inspire and activate parents. Parents need to hear from their spiritual leaders that they can do it. They need a pat on the back when they are moving in the right direction. Raising children to know and love the Lord is a long-haul commitment and the fervent flame that burns brightly at the outset can flicker and threaten to go out without regular and healthy doses of encouragement to stay the course. Parents need to be regularly reminded, whether there are visible results or not, the sacrifices being made are worth the payoff.

Encouragement can also come in the form of questions that activate parents in the process. The properly-delivered question, How are you intentionally leading your children spiritually? can have a powerful impact on parents. When this question is accompanied by real stories of parents who are intentionally leading their children, it provides motivating accounts revealing that taking up the mantle of discipleship of our

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<sup>11</sup> Hebrews 10:24-25.

<sup>12</sup> Romans 15:5.

children is rewarding. These types of stories and questions remind parents that this is what God has called them to, and this is what God has equipped them for.

A church that commits time, energy, and other valuable resources to the ministry of equipping and encouraging parents is a ministry that is wisely laying a foundation for vital connections between the natural and spiritual families. These kinds of connections increase the chances that believers, present and future, will appreciate and honor additional connections within their spiritual family tree.<sup>13</sup>

### The Local and Extended Family Connection

Younger generations are becoming less and less connected to denominational tags.<sup>14</sup> Causes and interests appear to be exerting far greater influence on their loyalties than doctrines and labels. This provides the church with a ripe landscape for encouraging family connections that go beyond the local church to the global church. The more we capitalize on these budding values and develop them within upcoming generations the more we can solidify historic connections with our spiritual family tree.

We live in a highly individualistic culture that surrounds us with self-centered messages. Such messages promote an attitude of indulgence and discontent that grows

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<sup>13</sup> By incorporating the value of the natural and the spiritual family this conviction actually offers a solidly biblical understanding of the place and value of singles in the spiritual family of God. As with other groups within the church, there are resources set aside for singles to have ministries and programs specifically for them, but the entire spiritual family is also regularly encouraged to come together in the process of spiritual formation.

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Bader, et. al., "American Piety in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: New Insights to the Depth and Complexity of Religion in the US," Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion (Waco, TX: Baylor University, September 2006), <http://www.isreligion.org/wp-content/uploads/American-Piety-Finall.pdf> (accessed November 12, 2011).

the more it is fed. By taking advantage of our local and extended family tree connections we send messages that have the potential of countering these negative cultural messages.

Family connections that span the global body of Christ tap in to the inherent values in younger generations, creating bridges for tangibly passing on our faith. They also highlight the limitlessness of the gospel and God's work around the world. Each believer's vision of God's mighty work can be vastly expanded as we highlight the branches of our spiritual family tree extending to the farthest reaches of the earth.

### *Cultivate a Spirit of Cooperation*

Mark Dever has written, "The closer we get to the heart of our faith, the more we expect unity in our understanding of the faith."<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, time has produced an increasing number of denominations, revealing a greater level of disunity within the body of Christ.<sup>16</sup> With each new denomination, or non-denomination, we further fragment our family tree and threaten to sever terminally the vital connections found there. One Southern Baptist writer has observed the devastating effects of a lack of cooperation. "The consequence will be a diminishing witness around the world."<sup>17</sup>

Churches that commit to cultivate a spirit of cooperation must find unity between their understanding of autonomy and cooperation. It is possible to remain an autonomous body and capitalize on the power of cooperation for impacting the world with the gospel

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Dever, *What is a Healthy Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 72.

<sup>16</sup> David Barret, "Denominational Data," Barna Update, November 2, 2002, The Barna Group, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/7-barna-update/11-david-barret-denomination-data> (accessed December 13, 2011).

<sup>17</sup> Morris H. Chapman, "Axioms of a Cooperating Southern Baptist," in *Southern Baptist Identity*, ed. David S. Dockery (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 160.

of Jesus Christ. Finding the unity between the two requires large doses of humility and prayerfulness.

Cooperation counteracts the individualism that is prevalent in our culture and many of our churches. It communicates the value of the diversity found within the body of Christ. Paul writes of the necessity of the diversity within the body of Christ in his first letter to the Corinthian church. In the twelfth chapter Paul stresses the dependence of the parts of the body upon one another and the essential nature of every part. We need to intentionally seek cooperating relationships with other churches outside of our local congregation. These partnerships should include churches within our denominational scope and those outside of it. If we do not pursue this kind of cooperation, we run the risk of communicating a lack of dependence on parts of the body outside our local congregation. This can result in congregational arrogance and self-centeredness. Cooperation communicates the biblical reality that we need one another. It reinforces the value of multiplying connections with our spiritual family tree.

Cultivating this spirit does not mean that we lay aside our essential convictions and beliefs. The best cooperation is the cooperation that takes place from a place of rootedness. Cooperation is a tool that serves a bigger purpose. By understanding this and moving forward in this way we stand to gain the greatest benefit from cooperation. At the same time that we expose future generations to the bigger picture of God's work in our world we also model for them a biblically faithful example of cooperation that refuses compromise.

There is an enormous interest among younger generations to participate in short-term mission trips. By taking full advantage of this interest, churches can reinforce

natural and spiritual family connections as well as local and extended family connections. Churches must choose to be intentional about stressing these connections throughout the experience. Few things can prompt individuals to look outside themselves and see their value to others as well as other's value to them like the immersion in an unfamiliar culture that mission trips provide.

Other avenues of collaboration can include denominational cooperation locally, nationally, and internationally. It can also include churches in the community that agree on the essential doctrines of the faith and share a common mission for spreading the gospel. In addition, para-church ministries that are solidly evangelical can be a source of deepening cooperation. There is a surplus of outlets within the body of Christ providing opportunities for cooperation. The challenge of the local church is to regularly nurture these cooperative connections.

### *Capitalize on the World's Connectivity*

In this age of connectivity we can capitalize on the "smallness" of the world and help our children see the vastness and diversity present within the spiritual family currently living. As the influence of technology continues to grow, the Disney song, "It's a Small World,"<sup>18</sup> rings truer and truer.

Younger generations have an affinity for the technologies that have so quickly shrunk our world. These technologies offer immense untapped potential, but they also have contributed to disconnect between the past and the future. Technology has made the youngest generations more connected than ever before but it has also made them more

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<sup>18</sup> Richard M. Sherman, Robert B. Sherman, and Winston Hibler, *Walt Disney Presents It's a Small World*, 1964.

isolated than ever before. One of the challenges facing the church is to capitalize on the positive possibilities found in technology, redeeming every ounce of it we possibly can.<sup>19</sup>

We have at our disposal the ability to almost instantaneously communicate with believers and missionaries on the other side of the world. Rather than having mission conferences in our churches that show pictures or videos of events that have taken place in the past on the mission field with a missionary who is on furlough, we can now have live access to the mission field. Short-term mission reports from teams sent through the church can take place during the trip as well as at its conclusion.

There are numerous resources available that provide believers with the opportunity to remain vitally connected with the church across the globe. Voice of the Martyrs provides a valuable resource for praying for and supporting the persecuted church, including the underground church in closed countries.<sup>20</sup> Samaritan's Purse can keep a church connected with the needy across the globe and provide a means to touch spiritual needs by meeting physical ones. A simple search of the internet reveals the vast array of possible ways to stay connected to the church across the world.

Capitalizing intentionally on the availability of these resources helps prevent our churches and future generations from growing up and ministering in a bubble that is isolated from the rest of the spiritual family. Like never before we have the capacity to see the mighty works of God even when we cannot necessarily see them in our own backyard.

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<sup>19</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), ebook, location 573 – 632 of 4693.

<sup>20</sup> A full listing of resources available from Voice of the Martyrs can be found at <http://www.persecution.com/> (accessed January 8, 2012).

The more churches can develop a culture of appreciation and dependence on the global body of Christ, the more likely that this and future generations will desire to connect with those ancestors who have gone before us.

### The Ancestral Connection

There is a desire among younger generations to make significant connections with their past. The body of material currently being produced for youth ministry related to this topic attests to this reality.<sup>21</sup> It seems as though everyone is trying to reinvent the ancient so that it resonates with younger generations, and younger generations are seizing this reformation.

It would appear that younger generations are hungry for the historic stories of Christianity. They are resonating with the true story of “how God plans to redeem the world.”<sup>22</sup> History is the unfolding story of this plan. What is found in the pages of Scripture is the most important, but we must acknowledge that the story continues to this day and will continue until God brings it to an end. How God has worked and is working is relevant and vital because it reveals that God is still active in the world.<sup>23</sup> These younger generations seem to be realizing that the stories of people who did not have it all right or all wrong are invaluable to our spiritual formation and they are craving connection with these lives of the past.

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<sup>21</sup> Some examples include, Mike Wonch, *Sacred Life: Spiritual Practices for Everyday Living* (Kansas City, MO: Barefoot Ministries, 2006). Matt Will, *Sacred Space: Meditations for Common Places* (Kansas City, MO: Barefoot Ministries, 2005). Kenda Creasy Dean, and Ron Foster, *The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 1998). Mike King, *Presence-Centered Youth Ministry: Guiding Students into Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

<sup>22</sup> Gerald L. Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 19.

<sup>23</sup> Sittser, *Water*, 19.



The connections already mentioned stir the passions for reconnecting with the mighty works of God in generations past. By connecting with God's work in the past through our spiritual ancestors, we highlight God's timelessness. Our ancestral connection spans our local church and its history, our denomination and its history, and the entirety of church history. At this point, story becomes critical. Stories connect us with people and their situations, thereby creating relationships between current believers and their ancestors. There is a multitude of media at the church's disposal for celebrating our ancestral connections with the spiritual family tree.

### *Celebrating Significant Moments in Our History*

History is full of significant moments that highlight the mighty works of God. God challenged the nation of Israel to set up feasts that were designed to help the people remember His works on a regular basis. To this day many Jews continue to practice annual feasts like the Passover.

This pattern can serve us well in our congregations too. We can celebrate things like Reformation Sunday in honor of the work that was done during the Reformation. We can also celebrate significant events in our local church's history like its anniversary and, perhaps, moments in which God worked miraculously. Few Baptist churches regularly recite the creeds of the Early Church, but celebrating significant moments in the history of the church can provide meaningful opportunities to introduce a congregation to these and other significant products of the church's collective work.

Every celebration does not need to be an immense production. Some can be as simple as an acknowledgement in the church communication piece. Celebrations could

coincide with a church-wide emphasis of some sort. Regardless of how it is done, by celebrating these moments as a church, we highlight God's activity in history and illuminate the reality that the redemption story still changes lives.

### *Celebrating Significant Personalities in Our History*

History is full of men and women who exemplify godly character. Men like Polycarp and John Wycliffe, and women like Perpetua and Joanna Wesley offer us great examples of individuals who lived out their faith in Jesus Christ. Yet, we can look closer to home to find these kinds of examples of godly character. Our churches are filled with such stories. None of these stories should be overlooked because they provide us with a powerful connection to the mighty people of God that can be very intimate for some in our congregation.

With the advance of technology we have unprecedented opportunities to capture the stories of these giants of the faith who are in our congregations. It would serve future generations well to have access to a recorded testimony of the lives of these individuals in their own words straight from their own mouth. Some of our seasoned saints may be reluctant to shine the spotlight on themselves in this way, but, with a little explaining of the rationale behind the project most will likely joyfully participate.

The idea of celebration must not ignore the reality that not all that is part of our history is perfect. The history of the church is filled with flawed individuals and failed attempts. Postmodern culture has been quick to highlight the reality that the history of Christianity includes many abuses. However, we can still celebrate because "corruption

does not imply worthlessness... Abuses do not destroy uses.”<sup>24</sup> As a matter of fact, these abuses and corruptions reveal with even greater poignancy the power of the life-changing gospel and the grace of God in human history. Our best celebration of our history should include the reality of the ugliness of sin presented in manners that exalt the grace of God found at the cross of Jesus Christ.

All of this must be done with an eye toward future generations, so what is passed on and instilled in ensuing generations is inherently transient in nature. We all must realize we are reservoirs that a vibrant faith passes through rather than stagnating ponds that horde. When we take this stance the family tree grows and the connections grow stronger, deeper, and more robust.

### **View Culture as a Vessel to Transmit the Gospel**

Isaac Backus models an understanding of the times in which he lived and an uncanny ability to take the history he studied and apply it masterfully in his context. It appears as though Backus saw elements of culture<sup>25</sup> as redeemable for Kingdom purposes. Adopting this conviction aids churches in passing on living faith to the next generation as Isaac Backus did. By committing to pursue a ministry that seeks to redeem

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<sup>24</sup> Sittser, *Water*, 20.

<sup>25</sup> In the context of this paper, culture is understood as “the beliefs, behaviors, objects, and other characteristics common to the members of a particular group or society. Through culture, people and groups define themselves, conform to society's shared values, and contribute to society. Thus, culture includes many societal aspects: language, customs, values, norms, mores, rules, tools, technologies, products, organizations, and institutions. This latter term **institution** refers to clusters of rules and cultural meanings associated with specific social activities. Common institutions are the family, education, religion, work, and health care.” CliffsNotes.com, *Culture and Society Defined*, [http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study\\_guide/topicArticleId-26957,articleId-26848.html](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study_guide/topicArticleId-26957,articleId-26848.html) (accessed January 8, 2012).

culture where possible, churches nurture an approach to ministry that innovates and adapts from generation to generation. It may seem counterintuitive to preserving the unchanging nature of the gospel, but when done with the proper balance, culture can actually be seen as a constantly changing vessel that transmits the never changing gospel. The beauty of this is found in the potential it has for allowing each generation to discover the power of the gospel for transforming their lives and their world, not just the world of their parents and grandparents.

In order for this to happen we must work at incorporating attitudes into our ministry that intentionally position us to redeem culture for the glory of God and the proclamation of the gospel. Intentionally maintaining these attitudes encourages the ongoing rootedness of our faith while providing the new vessels to carry that faith, intact, to each new generation. We can nurture an appreciation and respect for our history by seeing the changing culture as a natural part of history and living faith so we, like the sons of Issachar in the Old Testament, understand the times in which we live and know what to do in the midst of them to spread the gospel.<sup>26</sup>

Scripture teaches that everything God created is good, and we consecrate it through the Word of God and prayer.<sup>27</sup> Sadly, Satan and the powers of darkness have stolen and profaned much that God created for good. As we examine the culture around us, and the people we are seeking to reach with the life-giving gospel of Jesus Christ, there is much in culture that can be redeemed and consecrated to bring glory to God.

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<sup>26</sup> 1 Chronicles 12:32.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Timothy 4:1-4.

## Get Out!

If we are to redeem culture, we must know culture. If we are to know culture, we must interact with culture. Interacting requires that we be in and around culture, yet that can expose Christians to alluring temptations. Therefore, churches that desire to see their legacy passed on must consider how to insulate themselves in their interactions with culture rather than isolating themselves from culture. By insulating, Christians are equipped to get out into culture and discern how it can be redeemed while possessing the skill to recognize the negative cultural influences threatening to undo their faith.

Missionaries on the foreign field supply us with an example of this process of insulation while being in and around culture. Missionaries spend time on the field getting to know the people and the culture they are seeking to reach. This often requires learning the language and customs of the culture. A missionary may spend years studying the culture for the primary purpose of discerning how to present the gospel in a context the people will understand. They look for bridges and vessels within the culture that will convey and carry the unchanging gospel in the language of the people.

According to Scripture, every follower of Jesus Christ is a missionary.<sup>28</sup> We are strangers and aliens in this world and are called to share the gospel with every tribe, tongue, and nation.<sup>29</sup> A significant but under-stressed element of our role as missionaries is being missionaries and students of the culture in our own backyard. As sanctification

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<sup>28</sup> Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:20. The author is approaching a missionary as one who is sent with a message or a mission to a group of people. As such, we are each sent by God with the message of the gospel to the people we interact with every day.

<sup>29</sup> 1 Peter 2:11.

takes place in our lives, we become less and less “at home” in this fallen world, and more and more disconnected from things within the culture that threaten our faith. Our relationships gravitate to those who share our faith in Jesus Christ. The gap between us and the spiritually lost who live around us increases.<sup>30</sup> As this happens, our commitment to interacting with our culture will need to grow ever more intentional.

In order to counteract this distancing tendency, we must get out in our neighborhoods. We must get to know our neighbors. We should be teaching our congregations to care about what their neighbors like. Details like the ethnic make-up of the neighborhood, the radio stations and TV shows that are popular, and the hobbies and interests practiced can build bridges for sharing the gospel. Possessing an awareness of the challenges facing people and the things causing anxiety and stress open up opportunities to share Christ-like compassion. But all of this results only when we get out and see what is going on around us. We must resist the urge to hibernate and huddle within our walls, praying that people will come to us. Instead, we should make every effort to interact with our mission field by shopping at stores, attending entertainment venues, and doing business with vendors - all in our mission field. All the while we should be asking penetrating questions that help us to build relationships and understand the make-up of our mission field.

This kind of ministry mirrors the kind Jesus practiced. The gospels paint a picture of Jesus’ earthly ministry that involved only a small amount of time in the synagogue. Most of Jesus’ ministry took place among the people in their fields, villages, and homes.

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<sup>30</sup> “Stand in front of the Sunday morning church crowd and ask, ‘How many of you grew up in church and have been part of a church most of your lives?’ The majority of people will raise their hands. This is the problem. We, the Christian insiders, are called to reach the outsiders. But the insiders have been inside so long, we struggle to relate to the outsiders.” John Kramp, *Out of Their Faces and Into Their Shoes* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 3-4.

Jesus modeled a ministry that was outside the walls of the building in which the people of God gather and, instead, was embedded in the places where the people who needed the message the most could hear.

There are no shortcuts to becoming a ministry that values redeeming culture and gets out into the community. Awareness of the changes taking place around us can only come as we interact and are connected. Some have been tempted to rely on the connectedness of others. Pastors and authors who live in a different community, facing different challenges, write books resulting from their interaction with a different audience and different issues than we are likely facing in our community. These resources can be helpful to an extent; however, we should use caution when basing our church's approach to reaching our community on someone else's connectedness with their mission field. Our own prayerful connectedness to the individuals on our mission field must be much closer to the center of the things that contribute to the formulation of our plan to reach our mission field.

Making this commitment in ministry will surely challenge our proverbial comfort zone at times. There were several occasions when the disciples' preconceptions were upended by Jesus' approach to ministry. Each time this happened Jesus confronted their preconceptions and left no room for their aversion to stifle the ministry that was taking place. Instead he challenged the disciples to humbly exchange their preconceptions and preferences for the higher calling of conveying the life-giving gospel with penetrating relevance. Even in his last words to the disciples before the Ascension he reiterated the essential necessity of getting out among the people they were seeking to reach. He told

his original disciples to go, and each succeeding generation of disciples should do likewise.<sup>31</sup>

### Speak the Language

It is not enough to be students of culture: we must then become practitioners who speak the language of culture. Isaac Backus knew how to use the events and issues of his day to convey the timeless message of the gospel. While the separation of church and state was a rational and anthropocentric issue for many of the founding fathers in the United States, it was a spiritual and theocentric issue for Backus. In spite of the conflicting starting points Backus was still able to use it as a means to spread the gospel and advance the Kingdom of God.

The earthly ministry of Jesus presents yet another piercing example. Jesus regularly and consistently used illustrations that related to the lifestyle of the people to whom he ministered. Jesus spoke to them in parables that consisted of stories from nature, farming, fishing, slavery, family life, and other things that people experienced in their day-to-day life. By using elements from the daily lives of people as the canvas upon which he painted the gospel message, Jesus' message was relatable and memorable for those listening.

The apostle Paul spoke in the language of the people to whom he ministered. Writing to the Corinthian church, Paul asserted that whether it is a Jew, someone under the law, someone outside the law, or the weak he was committed to "become all things to

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<sup>31</sup> Matthew 28:19.



all people, that by all means I might save some.”<sup>32</sup> So there would be no mistaking the motivation behind his approach to ministry, Paul closes this portion of the letter with the following words, “I do it all for the sake of the gospel.”<sup>33</sup>

The Reformer, Martin Luther, burned with zeal for the people of Germany. He went beyond a desire to speak the language of the people to providing the people with the Word of God in their language. He longed for them to have the Bible in their native tongue, so they could know God. Though it was illegal, he personally translated the Bible into German so that the gospel could permeate the German culture and change the hearts of the German people.

It is vital that we speak the language of the people on our mission field. A missionary from France can expect to see minimal, if any, fruit if the approach to ministry taken is to speak French to a village of people who speak Mandarin. The missionary would not first expect the village to learn French. She would be expected to learn Mandarin. In addition, if the French missionary refused to adapt to the culture of the village and instead mocked and resisted their customs, it could potentially result in hostility to the missionary and any message that the missionary was attempting to convey.

Our culture is changing at a rapid pace that appears to be growing exponentially. We continually run the risk in our familiar environment to harbor negative and hostile attitudes to the changes that threaten our familiar patterns. When we allow this to take root in our lives, we become a missionary like the one described above and our ministry risks sliding into irrelevancy.

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<sup>32</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:22.

<sup>33</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:23.

It can be taxing to maintain a commitment to speaking the language of the culture. But this commitment does not require that we remain on the cutting edge of culture as much as it involves maintaining an allegiance to be a primary promoter and encourager who empowers and releases ministers and ministries to continue communicating the unchanging gospel in the ever-changing language of the culture. Redeeming culture and speaking the language of culture is a team effort that requires the involvement of those who are on the front lines as students, those who are in the trenches as interpreters, and those who are in the background supporting, encouraging, and releasing.

### Reinvent Regularly

As culture changes and the language we speak changes, many other elements of our ministry may need to change as well. Adopting an attitude accustomed to reinventing regularly is essential in viewing culture as a vessel that transmits instead of an enemy that attacks the gospel. We must allow for each generation to reinvent the ministry.

To thrive we must adapt since change is inevitable. God has built change into life and nature. As we are keeping our pulse on the culture in which we live and working to communicate in ways that connect the gospel to the needs and concerns of that culture, we will quickly recognize the need for frequent changes. These changes necessitate a healthy dose of caution mixed with the realization that we must adapt. The combination of the two can result in mentoring future generations and passing on our legacy and worldview in a way that keeps the body rooted and pliable for ongoing necessary adaptation. Ministries that prayerfully engage in the practical outgrowth of the unity of

these two values, encourage the natural process of the gospel transference to fresh jars of clay with each generation.

Methods change as concerns and questions of each new generation rise to the surface. Yet, the goal is that every generation remains rooted in the unchanging gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is the essential answer to every question for all people in all times and places. As we develop ministries seeking to engage in viewing church history as a part of their spiritual family tree and viewing culture as a vessel that transmits the gospel, the union of these convictions produces rooted relevance. We live and grow in such a way that our faith is rooted in the strong foundation of the orthodox heritage of the church and is lived out in the current culture in which we live. It reveals that the gospel is every bit as relevant to the lives of people today as it was at any point in history. It anchors us in orthodoxy expressed with penetrating relevance.

### **View Catechism as a Means of Intentional Discipleship**

Isaac Backus' results speak to the effectiveness of his discipleship methods. He utilized a diversity of resources rooted in the historic testimony of the Church. This approach helped establish the Baptist church he started on a path of gospel-centered ministry that has continued unbroken for over two hundred fifty years. His ability to root the church in the heritage of Christianity as a means of discipleship offers a workable model for Baptist churches and pastors seeking the same results in their congregations.

We need diligence because we, like Backus, must be students of our heritage. When we find a nugget, we share it. And we must be diligent to pass on our heritage with humility. We must be careful to avoid clinging so tightly to the packaging that we

make it essential to what we are passing on. The packaging will change with the culture, but the message must remain unchanged.

This requires that we creatively use earlier Christianity.<sup>34</sup> Early generations of Christians sought to live out their faith in their culture. For some that was a culture of oppression and underground faith as they faced persecution for their profession. For others it was the challenge of recapturing the orthodox expression of faith from the corruptions that had taken root in popular Christianity. For others it meant trying to navigate the sticky relationship between the church and the state in efforts to live out the ideal of a city on a hill. And for still others it meant battles with heresy that threatened to derail the church altogether.

We would be wise to realize that history is the track upon which we travel. The work of God has been a constant among and in his people since the Old and New Testament times, and it did not cease at the conclusion of the writing of the New Testament. For the past two thousand years God has continued to work in His Church and the stories we possess serve to advance our faith as we continue down the track of His-story.

The discipleship training that we undergo ourselves and walk through with younger generations is the engine that carries us on that historic track and keeps us from derailing. Though the packaging may change from generation to generation we have a great resource in the historic creeds, confessions of faith, and catechisms left behind by the church. These resources provide us with the foundations of our faith communicated in relevant ways in the generations in which they were utilized.

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<sup>34</sup> Mark Shaw, *Global Awakening: How 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2010), 64.

Catechism has been a tool that has carried the content of our faith in manageable forms throughout many generations. For many churches historic catechisms that have undergone little change remain a vital part of intentional discipleship. Yet, a correct understanding of catechism reveals that a more effective method may be to follow the counsel of Timothy George who writes, “Every pastor and every parent should adapt or write a catechism which is useful in their own context.”<sup>35</sup>

The simple definition of catechism provided by J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett lays the foundation for crafting catechisms that remain rooted in the historic foundations of the church and at the same time fit our culture, enabling us to engage in intentional and effective discipleship. They write that catechism is “the church’s ministry of grounding and growing God’s people in the Gospel and its implications for doctrine, devotion, duty, and delight.”<sup>36</sup> Based on this definition of catechism we do better to focus on the purpose of catechism rather than the package so that we utilize a style that best serves the purpose.

In our postmodern culture that values story, ancient connections, and interaction, there are three elements that come together to form a catechism that drives intentional discipleship in the church. They are: spiritual markers to celebrate, spiritual disciplines to emulate, and spiritual stories to motivate.

This kind of catechism stretches throughout the lifetime of a person. It includes each stage of a believer’s spiritual development. It combines heritage with context for a

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<sup>35</sup> George, Introduction, *Baptist Confessions*, 16.

<sup>36</sup> J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett, *Grounded in the Gospel: Building Believers the Old-Fashioned Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 29. John Piper keeps it even more simple and straightforward: “It simply means to teach Biblical truth in an orderly way. Generally this is done with questions and answers accompanied by Biblical support and explanation.” John Piper, *A Baptist Catechism* (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God Ministries), 1.

relevant and effective discipleship strategy that promotes revival and renewal while staying true to the biblical and Baptist foundation.

### Spiritual Markers to Celebrate

Our natural lives are filled with celebrations. These celebrations range from small and fleeting to immense and extended. When a child takes his first step, the people who are present applaud, rejoice, and cheer the child on. The spontaneous commotion can be too overwhelming for a child who is already incredibly focused on the task at hand and down they tumble with a look of blank confusion. When our teenagers graduate from high school the celebration is much more organized and immense, including presents and invitations and elaborate festivities.

Most of us make a point to celebrate birthdays and anniversaries each year, even when we get to the age when we would rather forget we are a year older. We also celebrate accomplishments, goals met, special days, and memorials. These celebrations offer a time to affirm those things we want to see repeated, like steps from an infant. They also afford the opportunity to reflect on things that really matter to us. At these times we may choose to reaffirm some things in our lives and also establish new goals as well.

A powerful aspect of catechism for a new generation is the element of celebration. God established feasts and celebrations for the Jewish people throughout their calendar year. There was seldom a great deal of time that passed before the Israelites were feasting once again. God built these times into their lives in order to help them remember something he had done for them or taught them. These celebrations were markers

strategically positioned throughout the life of the Israelites. They reminded and challenged the people to remain focused on their God and his work in their midst.

Spiritual markers incorporated into the discipleship efforts of a church can provide the framework for similar results in Christians. These markers are intentionally and strategically connected to the life of the church to affirm qualities we desire to see repeated spiritually. They afford us seasons of remembrance in which we can highlight accomplished spiritual goals and challenge with new spiritual goals. They are also opportunities to keep the spiritual commitment we have made fresh and growing through regular celebration.

Spiritual markers provide opportunities to celebrate and unite the discipleship efforts of the natural family and the spiritual family. A plan for spiritual formation that includes spiritual markers that span our lifetime also provides opportunities for every member of the church to see how his or her spiritual formation is impacted by and impacts the spiritual formation of others within the body. These serve as stones of remembrance for the entire local church family.

One of the powerful aspects of these celebrations is that they reinforce the cooperative work for spiritual growth that is to take place in the home and in the church. The celebrations can reveal what the church is seeking to do and what could potentially be taking place at home. It affirms how the two working in cooperation can provide a fertile landscape for reaching the next pinnacle of spiritual growth.

Spiritual markers are significant times in the life of a person that bring about a transition within the journey with Christ. Spiritual markers can be divided into many categories. Two in particular that form a core are: spiritual markers that must take place

in every believer's life but are not connected to a particular life stage, i.e. conversion and baptism, and spiritual markers that are connected to general life stages.<sup>37</sup>

When spiritual markers are being celebrated in the life of the church and in the context of the home, what begins to develop is an atmosphere in which people are regularly and intentionally reminded of what a church values spiritually. As the angels rejoice in heaven over one sinner who comes to repentance, so the church and the home rejoice as believers in Jesus Christ grow in their spiritual maturity.

### Spiritual Disciplines to Emulate

For centuries the church has practiced spiritual disciplines for the sake of growing in faith and reinforcing certain spiritual fruit in our lives. In the Old and New Testament we see evidence of the value and necessity of developing habits within our physical lives that strengthen our spiritual formation. Throughout the history of the church, men and women who gravitated to the importance of spiritual disciplines either stole away to the isolation of the desert or wilderness to practice an intensive life of spiritual discipline, or they gathered together in focused communities who shared this common desire and challenged one another in it.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> For an example of how spiritual markers are incorporated into spiritual formation at MorningStar Baptist Church see Appendix Four. Another example is available at Brian Haynes, <http://legacymilestones.com/> (accessed December 20, 2011). This is a website with many helpful resources for churches interested in taking part in what Brian Haynes calls "Legacy Milestones," a process for effectively discipling our children. Church membership and the Lord's Supper are two other general spiritual markers. For a resource on the importance of the Lord's Supper to our spiritual formation see, John Jefferson Davis, *Worship and the Reality of God: An Evangelical Theology of Real Presence* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

<sup>38</sup> Ivan J. Kauffman, *Follow Me: A History of Christian Intentionality* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009). See also, Sittser, *Water*, 73-117. Each provide an overview of the history of the desert saints and the monastics.



Given the interactive, hands-on nature of postmodern generations, the practice of spiritual disciplines incorporated into catechism makes the catechism even more appealing. The challenge churches face is guiding individuals to practice the appropriate spiritual disciplines in the appropriate way at the appropriate time.<sup>39</sup> The goal is to intentionally guide people in the process of spiritual growth not only through spiritual celebrations but also through disciplines to emulate.

Spiritual disciplines are complementary to the spiritual markers in a person's life and are connected to the spiritual formation that is taking place in the person's life. Oftentimes the teaching and practice of spiritual disciplines is presented in ways that seem to communicate that spiritual disciplines are ends in themselves. Churches present them as a list of activities that have the potential to make us more spiritual. This does not resonate well with younger generations who have grown up on a healthy dose of "Moralistic Therapeutic Deism"<sup>40</sup> that hinges on legalistic lists of what to do and what not to do.

Spiritual disciplines are most fruitful in our lives when they are practiced in conjunction with an awareness of where we are in our spiritual formation. This

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<sup>39</sup> When Jesus was questioned by John the Baptist's followers as to why his disciples did not fast, Jesus responded, "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast." This response reveals that there are certain times when particular spiritual disciplines may be more suitable than others. Solomon reinforces this in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8.

<sup>40</sup> This label is based on the results of the National Study of Youth and Religion researching adolescent spirituality from 2003-2005 and, what she calls "a spate of smaller studies that largely echo its findings." Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford, 2010), 3-4. Christian Smith, the principal investigator of the National Study of Youth and Religion, and Melinda Lundquist Denton, project manager of the National Study of Youth and Religion, define Moralistic Therapeutic Deism as, "First...about inculcating a moralistic approach to life....Second, about providing therapeutic benefits to its adherents....Finally...[it] is a belief in a particular kind of God: one who exists, created the world, and defines our general moral order, but not one who is particularly personally involved in one's affairs-especially affairs in which one would prefer not to have God involved." Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford, 2005), 162-164.

awareness includes prayerful consideration of what God has been doing in the life of an individual. It also includes an honest assessment of a believer's spiritual condition. This kind of assessment provides wisdom upon which to practice spiritual disciplines.

When the process of spiritual formation and the practice of spiritual disciplines is rooted in love for God and a desire to see that love grow increasingly throughout our lives, it provides a lasting and meaningful foundation upon which to practice the various spiritual disciplines. By recognizing our spiritual development as a journey that is more akin to the yearly cycle of seasons than the linear upward progression of a graph reflecting the growth of compounded interest, we help growing believers develop more of a biblical understanding of our journey of faith. This understanding is able to discern the reality that not all valleys are bad and not all peaks are good. In turn, we can recognize, for example, that the spiritual discipline of prayer should always be active in a believer's life; however, the manifestation of prayer may change, based on the season a believer finds herself navigating.

Teaching and practicing spiritual disciplines in this way reinforces the connection between the natural and the spiritual family. Whole families can approach the practice of spiritual disciplines speaking the same language. They have a common framework to challenge one another to love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love their neighbor as themselves, using spiritual disciplines as a tool to help increase these traits in their daily lives.

Whole families can work through their spiritual journey together and consider it as an entire family, not just as individuals. In so doing, families can determine what the appropriate spiritual disciplines and activities are for them over the coming months.<sup>41</sup>

### Spiritual Stories to Motivate

Our western rational culture that has spent so many years in the shadow of the Enlightenment often forgets the reality that most of history has witnessed people passing on worldview and faith through the medium of story. The Old and New Testament both underscore the importance of story for passing on faith. The Early Church followed along in the same vein. As our culture distances itself more and more from the effects of the Enlightenment, we are seeing a return to the medium of story. A catechism that penetrates the hearts of blossoming generations will incorporate the element of story for teaching, living, and re-teaching the historic faith.

Stories are a powerful medium for teaching the faith to one another. In our technology-saturated culture we can create visual story at reasonable expense. Our storying can be both verbal and visual. With the availability of technology we have the opportunity as churches to capture the history of our churches and our godly saints in ways that can be shared with generation after generation. Some may consider sitting and listening to the history of their church as a boring exercise involving a droning narrator speaking over sketch art, but the presence of interviews with actual individuals who were there and sacrificed blood, sweat, and tears in the establishment of the church can make it a whole different experience.

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<sup>41</sup> Appendix five provides an example of how spiritual disciplines can be encouraged with the principles described in view.

Gary Sitsser believes that we have a huge advantage over the generations of believers that have gone before us because we come later in the story. He writes, “Chronology works in our favor. The saints could not see us, but we can see them, study the past they helped to create and learn from their feats and errors. We will be the better for it if we do, for they have much to teach us.”<sup>42</sup>

As churches who desire to root generations in the faith, we should take advantage of every opportunity and avenue at our disposal for sharing stories of the mighty work of God in the past and the present. This can include incorporating stories of heroes of the faith into our worship and teaching times. It can also include highlighting testimonies of individuals who are candidates for baptism or church-membership. Faith heritage stories of senior members and faith step stories from younger members can also be incorporated into the steady diet of faith-story telling.

The idea of story as part of catechism needs to progress beyond just telling faith stories to challenging individuals to live out their involvement in God’s larger story. We must convey to our congregations that God is still unfolding history, and we are an essential part of it. As we faithfully and fruitfully live out our role in the story God is writing, we become a vital part of the great cloud of witnesses for future generations. Living out our part in the story also impacts the present because it reveals to others that God’s story lives on and still has the power to change lives. It reveals that the invitation to experience redemption by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is still available to those who would come.

For each generation there are elements of catechism that will remain, but there must be other elements that are changed so they can clearly communicate the eternal

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<sup>42</sup> Sitsser, *Water*, 20.

truths of Scripture in understandable ways to each generation. This is where stories that motivate must be re-created. We hear the stories that make up the fabric of our faith heritage, we live our part in the story, becoming a part of the fabric of our faith heritage, and then, on that foundation, we produce new parables and stories that carry the unchanging message of the gospel in the language of the people. This must happen on the solid foundation of our faith, and it can only be done by individuals who have a deep reverence for the gospel. In coming up with new parables and stories we want to shine greater light on the gospel rather than strip it of its essence, and we keep the cycle of rooted relevance flourishing in our discipleship. Therefore, we allow life-giving gospel to be transmitted through new wineskins.

These three convictions provide a framework by which churches that desire to create an atmosphere conducive for ongoing renewal from generation to generation can begin to flesh out how this type of ministry will look for them. Though many churches may share these convictions, no two will look alike in practice. Each congregation must commit to the gloriously grueling task of seeking the plans of the Lord for their unique moment in history. The apostle Paul did it. Isaac Backus did it. We, too, must do it and trust that God will guide our particular efforts for such a time as this. The principles are few and shared, but the methods are many. The principles will not change from church to church and generation to generation, but the methods must. Isaac Backus understood this and built these principles into the DNA of the church he planted so many generations ago. This church continues to pass those convictions on with each generation in ways that have allowed the church to continue to thrive in their efforts to spread the gospel.

May a multiplying number of churches begin to experience the same for the sake of our children's children.

## CONCLUSION

Jesus' commission to go and make disciples still rings in the ears of his followers. Methods have changed through the centuries, and cultures have changed as well. Saints have come and saints have gone. The ebb and flow of history continues its journey forward awaiting the imminent return of Jesus Christ and the restoration of all things.

In some ways the Church has come full circle. Our situation is similar to that of the early church. As the faith spread throughout the Gentile world, they witnessed the conversion of individuals who had no biblical framework upon which to build their faith. This pre-Christian environment necessitated starting from scratch with new converts, instilling truth in its most basic simple forms. At the same time it revealed the deception and falsehood of the views these new converts possessed and had built their life upon. In our post-Christian culture we can no longer assume that someone knows the Ten Commandments or the Beatitudes. We must treat everyone as though he or she has no foundation of Scripture. With this as our starting point we need tools that teach new converts the unfamiliar words and concepts that make up our faith and theology in a post-Christian context. We too must start from scratch or what we build upon is a shaky foundation.<sup>1</sup>

The early church turned to their creeds and catechisms as tools for discipleship. The Reformers did the same, and now we can revive this ancient practice in our own time. There are many benefits of such a revival. It provides a clear and concise summary

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Keller, "The Supremacy of Christ and the Gospel in a Postmodern World," 2006 Desiring God National Conference, Second Saturday Morning General Session, September 30, 2006, MP3 file. <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/conference-messages/the-supremacy-of-christ-and-the-gospel-in-a-postmodern-world> (accessed September 13, 2010).

for those in the faith and those outside the faith, serving as a testimony, an instructional tool, and a defense against error.

Yet, in the early church, these resources were much more than just intellectual ascent to universal doctrine. Because of the covenantal foundation of Judaism and Christianity, the verbalization of these confessions was part of the covenant making process revealing, through oral recitation, what was taking place in the inner life of the catechumenate.<sup>2</sup> This is, by far, the greatest benefit for us, as it was for the early church.

Intentional connections with the ecclesiastical documents of the past help us stay connected with our rich heritage and provide for us summary statements that guide us in “distinguishing Christian faith and life from the pagan hodge podge”<sup>3</sup> surrounding us. So “instead of truncating one’s grasp of truth, confessions and creeds are designed to expand it. Confessions, arising as they do out of the meshing between word and world, warn the reader of destructive interpretations of Scripture and teach him vital truths for which he should search in Scripture.”<sup>4</sup> They can be a great teaching aid for all believers, not just young or new believers.

The concern of this paper is not whether or not Baptists should have a commonly held creed or confession. The desire is to challenge individual pastors and churches to reconnect with the heritage of Baptist history and Church history for the enrichment it brings. It literally has the ability of being a powerful tool of renewal and revival as we

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<sup>2</sup> Robert S. Rayburn, “Biblical and Pastoral Basis for Creeds and Confessions,” *Premise* vol.III, number 3, March 29, 1996, <http://www.reformedreader.org/bpcc.htm> (accessed September, 30, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Rayburn, “Biblical and Pastoral Basis for Creeds and Confessions.”

<sup>4</sup> Tom J. Nettles, “Are Creeds Appropriate for Bible Believing Baptists?” *Founder’s Journal*, issue 3, fall/winter 1990-91, under “Contra Sola Scriptura.” [http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/journal/fj03/article2\\_fr.html](http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/journal/fj03/article2_fr.html) (accessed October 11, 2009).



utilize the history of creeds, confessions, and catechisms to connect our people with the lives that have gone before them as heroes of the faith. One scholar has called the Southern Baptist Convention's Baptist Faith and Message "an anchor."<sup>5</sup> We are in need of such anchors as we face our future in a post-Christian society. "Even the best intentioned Christians of any age are subject to a tendency to imbalance, to a loss of equilibrium among the truths of divine revelation."<sup>6</sup> The presence of anchors can stay this trend. Rayburn continues, "It is the witness of the past, clearly heard and firmly held, that prevents the church from losing its balance under the onslaught of the interests, preoccupations, and sins of its own day."<sup>7</sup>

We are inestimably indebted to the great cloud of witnesses who has stood firm in the faith and passed it along to us. We now bear the responsibility of continuing that legacy in an unbroken chain, realizing that our greatest impact for the kingdom of God may take place long after we have breathed our last breath. We must leave a legacy that blesses the cities in which we live. In addition, our legacy must model a deep abiding faith in Jesus Christ that is passed along to the next generation. In this, we walk by faith, trusting that our legacy for those not yet born could be what God uses to spark their faith in ways we never imagined. Our first call of duty is to once again firmly connect ourselves, and our descendants, with the cloud. If we succeed, the cloud will enlarge with each passing generation promising the potential of bursting forth and raining down the glory of God on the fertile soil of the young hearts of each new generation.

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<sup>5</sup> Herschel H. Hobbs, "Southern Baptists and Confessionalism: a Comparison of the Origins and Contents of the 1925 and 1963 Confessions," *Review & Expositor* 76.1 (1979): 55-68. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*. EBSCO (accessed, December 31, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Rayburn, "Biblical and Pastoral Basis for Creeds and Confessions."

<sup>7</sup> Rayburn, "Biblical and Pastoral Basis for Creeds and Confessions."

As Baptists, we face the challenge of ensuring that we do not cut ourselves off from the wider heritage that is rightfully ours. As we come to grips with this reality, many of us will need to face a reversal of our current course and a reconnection with our wider ecclesiastical heritage. If we continue either intentionally or unintentionally disconnecting, we rob and restrict ourselves of so much that is ours in Christ Jesus. We must lay aside our tendencies toward arrogance, rooted in the belief that our corner of evangelicalism is the best, and humbly acknowledge the debt we owe to the Church that has gone before. D. A. Carson has aptly written, “The person without roots, heritage, self-identity, and nonnegotiable values is not really flexing, but is simply being driven hither and yon by the vagaries of every whimsical opinion that passes by.”<sup>8</sup>

An intentional study of our past often reveals that the things we face today are the same things that the church of generations past had to face. The names may have changed and the packaging may be fresh but the principles are still the same. Gnosticism, Arianism, and Pelagianism are examples of epic battles for orthodoxy in the history of the Church that hold invaluable lessons for the Church today. Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Augustine’s study of Scripture and writings against these attacks upon the gospel, respectively, provide a foundation upon which we can address the threats to orthodoxy we face in our generation.<sup>9</sup>

The way forward for Baptists can be found by reconnecting with our past. By celebrating and embracing the doctrinal bastions of the past and utilizing the resources left behind by those who won these victories. Too much is at stake for us to refuse to lay

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<sup>8</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 121.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008). This book is a fine example of a contemporary evangelical who compares some of the current approaches to the gospel with those of Pelagius.

aside the prejudices that prevent us from recapturing what has been lost in our heritage. We must continue to heed the example of men like Isaac Backus and others who are calling for a re-evaluation of our connection with the historic church. By doing so we stand to gain for our Baptist congregations the kind of future renewal we dream of, strategize for, and for which we give God all the glory.

## APPENDIX 1

### CREEDS

#### **The Apostle's Creed**

1. I believe in God Almighty [Rufinus, the Father Almighty]
2. And in Christ Jesus, his only son, our Lord
3. Who was born of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary
4. Who was crucified under Pontius Pilate and was buried
5. And the third day rose from the dead
6. Who ascended into heaven
7. And sitteth on the right hand of the Father
8. Whence he cometh to judge the living and the dead
9. And in the Holy Ghost
10. The holy church
11. The remission of sins
12. The resurrection of the flesh
13. The life everlasting. [Rufinus omits.]<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Documents of the Christian Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, ed. Henry Bettenson & Chris Maunder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 26.

## **Nicaeno-Constantinopolitan Creed**

We believe in one God the Father All-soveriegn, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all the ages, Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through whom all things were made; who for us men and for our salvation came down from the heavens, and was made flesh of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and became man, and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate and suffered and was buried, and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures, and ascended into the heavens, and sits on the right hand of the Father, and comes again with glory to judge living and dead, of whose kingdom there shall be no end; and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and the Life-giver, that proceeds from the Father, who with Father and Son is worshipped together and glorified together, who spoke through the prophets; in one holy catholic and apostolic church; we acknowledge one baptism unto remission of sins; we look for a resurrection of the dead, and the life of the age to come.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Church History Volume One: From Christ to Pre-Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 210.

## **The Definition of Chalcedon (451)**

Therefore, following the holy Fathers, we all with one accord teach men to acknowledge one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, at once complete in Godhead and complete in manhood, truly God and truly man, consisting also of a reasonable soul and body; of one substance (ὁμοουσιος) with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood; like us in all respects, apart from sin; as regards his Godhead, begotten of the Father before the ages, but yet as regards his manhood begotten, for us men and for our salvation, of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer (θεοτοκος); one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, recognized in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being in no way annulled by the union, but rather the characteristics of each nature being preserved and coming together to form one person and subsistence (υποστασις), not as parted or separated into two persons, but one and the same Son and Only-begotten God the Word, Lord Jesus Christ; even as the prophets from earliest times spoke of him, and our Lord Jesus Christ himself taught us, and the creed of the Fathers has handed down to us.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> *Documents of the Christian Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, ed. Henry Bettenson & Chris Maunder, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 56-57.

## **The Athanasian Creed**

1. Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith;
2. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.
3. And the catholic faith is this: That we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity;
4. Neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substance.
5. For there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Spirit.
6. But the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is all one, the glory equal, the majesty coeternal.
7. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Spirit.
8. The Father uncreated, the Son uncreated, and the Holy Spirit uncreated.
9. The Father incomprehensible, the Son incomprehensible, and the Holy Spirit incomprehensible.
10. The Father eternal, the Son eternal, and the Holy Spirit eternal.
11. And yet they are not three eternal but one eternal.
12. As also there are not three uncreated nor three incomprehensible, but one uncreated and one incomprehensible.
13. So likewise the Father is almighty, the Son almighty, and the Holy Spirit almighty.
14. And yet they are not three almighties, but one almighty.
15. So the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God;

16. And yet they are not three Gods, but one God.
17. So likewise the Father is Lord, the Son Lord, and the Holy Spirit Lord;
18. And yet they are not three Lords but one Lord.
19. For like as we are compelled by the Christian verity to acknowledge every Person by himself to be God and Lord;
20. So are we forbidden by the catholic religion to say; There are three Gods or three Lords.
21. The Father is made of none, neither created nor begotten.
22. The Son is of the Father alone; not made nor created, but begotten.
23. The Holy Spirit is of the Father and of the Son; neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding.
24. So there is one Father, not three Fathers; one Son, not three Sons; one Holy Spirit, not three Holy Spirits.
25. And in this Trinity none is afore or after another; none is greater or less than another.
26. But the whole three persons are coeternal, and coequal.
27. So that in all things, as aforesaid, the Unity in Trinity and the Trinity in Unity is to be worshipped.
28. He therefore that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity.
29. Furthermore it is necessary to everlasting salvation that he also believe rightly the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ.
30. For the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and man.



31. God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds; and man of substance of His mother, born in the world.
32. Perfect God and perfect man, of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting.
33. Equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching His manhood.
34. Who, although He is God and man, yet He is not two, but one Christ.
35. One, not by conversion of the Godhead into flesh, but by taking of that manhood into God.
36. One altogether, not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person.
37. For as the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one Christ;
38. Who suffered for our salvation, descended into hell, rose again the third day from the dead;
39. He ascended into heaven, He sits on the right hand of the Father, God, Almighty;
40. From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
41. At whose coming all men shall rise again with their bodies;
42. and shall give account of their own works.
43. And they that have done good shall go into life everlasting and they that have done evil into everlasting fire.
44. This is the catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.ccel.org/creeds/athanasian.creed.html> (accessed November 21, 2009).

## APPENDIX 2

### THE CHICAGO CALL: AN APPEAL TO EVANGELICALS

#### **Prologue**

In every age the Holy Spirit calls the church to examine its faithfulness to God's revelation in Scripture. We recognize with gratitude God's blessing through the evangelical resurgence in the church. Yet at such a time of growth we need to be especially sensitive to our weaknesses. We believe that today evangelicals are hindered from achieving full maturity by a reduction of the historic faith. There is, therefore, a pressing need to reflect upon the substance of the biblical and historic faith and to recover the fullness of this heritage. Without presuming to address all our needs, we have identified eight of the themes to which we as evangelical Christians must give careful theological consideration.

#### **A Call to Historic Roots and Continuity**

We confess that we have often lost the fullness of our Christian heritage, too readily assuming that the Scriptures and the Spirit make us independent of the past. In so doing, we have become theologically shallow, spiritually weak, blind to the work of God in others and married to our cultures.

Therefore we call for a recovery of our full Christian heritage. Throughout the church's history there has existed an evangelical impulse to proclaim the saving, unmerited grace of Christ, and to reform the church according to the Scriptures. This impulse appears in the doctrines of the ecumenical councils, the piety of the early fathers,

the Augustinian theology of grace, the zeal of the monastic reformers, the devotion of the practical mystics and the scholarly integrity of the Christian humanists. It flowers in the biblical fidelity of the Protestant Reformers and the ethical earnestness of the Radical Reformation. It continues in the efforts of the Puritans and Pietists to complete and perfect the Reformation.

It is reaffirmed in the awakening movements of the 18th and 19th centuries which joined Lutheran, Reformed, Wesleyan and other evangelicals in an ecumenical effort to renew the church and to extend its mission in the proclamation and social demonstration of the Gospel. It is present at every point in the history of Christianity where the Gospel has come to expression through the operation of the Holy Spirit: in some of the strivings toward renewal in Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism and in biblical insights in forms of Protestantism differing from our own. We dare not move beyond the biblical limits of the Gospel; but we cannot be fully evangelical without recognizing our need to learn from other times and movements concerning the whole meaning of that Gospel.

### **A Call to Biblical Fidelity**

We deplore our tendency toward individualistic interpretation of Scripture. This undercuts the objective character of biblical truth, and denies the guidance of the Holy Spirit among his people through the ages.

Therefore we affirm that the Bible is to be interpreted in keeping with the best insights of historical and literary study, under the guidance of the church. We affirm that the Scriptures, as the infallible Word of God, are the basis of authority in the church. We acknowledge that God uses the Scripture to judge and to purify his Body. The church,

illuminated and guided by the Holy Spirit, must in every age interpret, proclaim and live out the Scriptures.

### **A Call to Creedal Identity**

We deplore two opposite excesses: a creedal church that merely recites a faith inherited from the past, and a creedless church that languishes in a doctrinal vacuum. We confess that as evangelicals we are not immune from these defects.

Therefore we affirm the need in our time for a confessing church that will boldly witness to its faith before the world, even under threat of persecution. In every age the church must state its faith over against heresy and paganism. What is needed is a vibrant confession that excludes as well as includes, and thereby aims to purify faith and practice. Confessional authority is limited by and derived from the authority of Scripture, which alone remains ultimately and permanently normative. Nevertheless, as the common insight of those who have been illuminated by the Holy Spirit and seek to be the voice of the “holy catholic church,” a confession should serve as a guide for the interpretation of Scripture. We affirm the abiding value of the great ecumenical creeds and the Reformation confessions. Since such statements are historically and culturally conditioned, however, the church today needs to express its faith afresh, without defecting from the truths apprehended in the past. We need to articulate our witness against the idolatries and false ideologies of our day.

## **A Call to Holistic Salvation**

We deplore the tendency of evangelicals to understand salvation solely as an individual, spiritual and otherworldly matter to the neglect of the corporate, physical and this-worldly implication of God's saving activity.

There fore we urge evangelicals to recapture a holistic view of salvation. The witness of Scripture is that because of sin our relationships with God, ourselves, others and creation are broken. Through the atoning work of Christ on the cross, healing is possible for these broken relationships.

Wherever the church has been faithful to its calling, it has proclaimed personal salvation; it has been a channel of God's healing to those in physical and emotional need; it has sought justice for the oppressed and disinherited; and it has been a good steward of the natural world.

As evangelicals we acknowledge our frequent failure to reflect this holistic view of salvation. We therefore call the church to participate fully in God's saving activity through work and prayer, and to strive for justice and liberation for the oppressed, looking forward to the culmination of salvation in the new heaven and new earth to come.

## **A Call to Sacramental Integrity**

We decry the poverty of sacramental understanding among evangelicals. This is largely due to the loss of our continuity with the teaching of many of the Fathers and Reformers and results in the deterioration of sacramental life in our churches. Also, the

failure to appreciate the sacramental nature of God's activity in the world often leads us to disregard the sacredness of daily living.

Therefore we call evangelicals to awaken to the sacramental implications of creation and incarnation. For in these doctrines the historic church has affirmed that God's activity is manifested in a material way. We need to recognize that the grace of God is mediated through faith by the operation of the Holy Spirit in a notable way in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Here the church proclaims, celebrates and participates in the death and resurrection of Christ in such a way as to nourish her members throughout their lives in anticipation of the consummation of the kingdom. Also, we should remember our biblical designation as "living epistles," for here the sacramental character of the Christian's daily life is expressed.

### **A Call to Spirituality**

We suffer from a neglect of authentic spirituality on the one hand, and an excess of undisciplined spirituality on the other hand. We have too often pursued a superhuman religiosity rather than the biblical model of a true humanity released from bondage to sin and renewed by the Holy Spirit.

Therefore we call for a spirituality which grasps by faith the full content of Christ's redemptive work: freedom from the guilt and power of sin, and newness of life through the indwelling and outpouring of his Spirit. We affirm the centrality of the preaching of the Word of God as a primary means by which his Spirit works to renew the church in its corporate life as well as in the individual lives of believers. A true

spirituality will call for identification with the suffering of the world as well as the cultivation of personal piety.

We need to rediscover the devotional resources of the whole church, including the evangelical traditions of Pietism and Puritanism. We call for an exploration of devotional practice in all traditions within the church in order to deepen our relationship both with Christ and with other Christians. Among these resources are such spiritual disciplines as prayer, meditation, silence, fasting, Bible study and spiritual diaries.

### **A Call to Church Authority**

We deplore our disobedience to the Lordship of Christ as expressed through authority in his church. This has promoted a spirit of autonomy in persons and groups resulting in isolationism and competitiveness, even anarchy, within the body of Christ. We regret that in the absence of godly authority, there have arisen legalistic, domineering leaders on the one hand and indifference to church discipline on the other.

Therefore we affirm that all Christians are to be in practical submission to one another and to designated leaders in a church under the Lordship of Christ. The church, as the people of God, is called to be the visible presence of Christ in the world. Every Christian is called to active priesthood in worship and service through exercising spiritual gifts and ministries. In the church we are in vital union both with Christ and with one another. This calls for community with deep involvement and mutual commitment of time, energy and possessions. Further, church discipline, biblically based and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, is essential to the well-being and ministry of God's people.

Moreover, we encourage all Christians organizations to conduct their activities with genuine accountability to the whole church.

### **A Call to Church Unity**

We deplore the scandalous isolation and separation of Christians from one another. We believe such division is contrary to Christ's explicit desire for unity among his people and impedes the witness of the church in the world. Evangelicalism is too frequently characterized by an ahistorical, sectarian mentality. We fail to appropriate the catholicity of historic Christianity, as well as the breadth of the biblical revelation.

Therefore we call evangelicals to return to the ecumenical concern of the Reformers and the later movements of evangelical renewal. We must humbly and critically scrutinize our respective traditions, renounce sacred shibboleths, and recognize that God works within diverse historical streams. We must resist efforts promoting church union-at-any-cost, but we must also avoid mere spiritualized concepts of church unity. We are convinced that unity in Christ requires visible and concrete expressions. In this belief, we welcome the development of encounter and cooperation within Christ's church. While we seek to avoid doctrinal indifferentism and a false irenicism, we encourage evangelicals to cultivate increased discussion and cooperation, both within and without their respective traditions, earnestly seeking common areas of agreement and understanding.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://smallvoices.net/sv5/chicago.htm> (accessed February 5, 2010).



## APPENDIX 3

### HISTORIC AND CURRENT CONFESSIONS OF FAITH

#### **The Confession of Faith and Church-Covenant, of the Church of Christ in the Joining Borders of Bridgwater and Middleborough<sup>1</sup>**

##### The Articles of Faith

###### *Part One*

1. We Believe that there is one only Living and true God, Who is a Spirit, Infinite, Eternal, and Unchangabl In his being, Wisdom, Power, Holiness, Justice, Goodness, and Truth.
2. That there are three Persons in the God-head, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; Which are but one God, the same Substance, Equeal in Power and Glory.
3. That the holy Scriptures of the old and new testament are the word of God, Wherein he hath given us a Perfect rule of faith and practice.
4. That God for his own glory, hath fore-ordained Whatsoever Comes to Pass.
5. That God Did in the begining Create the heavens and the Earth and all things that are in them; and Doth uphold all things by the word of His Power.
6. That he did Create man in his own image, in Knoledg, Righteousness, and true holiness; and made With him a Covenant of Life: the Condition where-of, was Perfect Obedience.
7. That man Soon fell into Sin against God, whereby he brought himself and all his posterity Into a State of Death.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaac Backus, *The Diary of Isaac Backus*, Volume III: 1786-1806, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1979), Appendix 3.

8. That man being thus Dead; his recovery is Wholely In and from God.
9. That God of his mear good pleasure from all Eternity hath Chosen a number in Christ Jesus To Eternal salvation.
10. That Christ Jesus hath Come and taken on Him our nature and hath Satesfied the justice of God and Brought in a Complat and Everlasting Righteousness and hath assended To the right hand of God and Ever Liveith to make intercesion for us.
11. That the holy Spirit and he only can and Doth make a Particular aplication of the redemption purchased by Christ to Every Elect soul.
12. That We are of the number that Christ hath Purchased with his Blood Which he hath given us To believe by sending the holy Spirit to Convince us of our Lost and miserable condition and the Discovered and Offered to us the glorious Saviour In his sutableness and Sufficiency and inabled us To Imbrace him with our whole souls whereby he is made unto us, Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption.
13. That the Life of Religion Concisteth in Knoledg of God and Conformity to him in the inward man which necesarily Produceth an External Conformity to his Law.
14. That true Believers by vertue of their union To Christ have Sencable felloship one with another Whereby they are made pertakers of Each others gifts and graces.
15. That the first Day of the week Comonly Caled The Lords day, is the Christian Sabbath.
16. That there will be a resurrection both of the just and unjust and that God hath apointed a day in the Which he will Judge the world in righteousness and Reward Every man according to his Works.

*Part the Second Concerning Church affairs*

1. We Believe that a visable Church is a number of true Believers by mutual acquaintance and Communion voluntarily and understandingly Covenanting and Embodying Together for the Carrying on the Worship and service of God.
2. That there are two Sacriments of the new Testament: viz Baptism and the Lords Supper.
3. That true Believers and their infant seed and None but Such have a right to the ordinance of Baptism. Acts 8:37 and 2:38:39.
4. That Whosoever Presumes to administer or Pertake of the Seals of the Covenant Of Grace without Saveing faith are in Danger of Sealing their own damnation. Therefore The door of the Church should be Carefully Kept at all times against all Such as Canot Give Scriptural Evidences of their union to Christ by faith. 1 Corinth. 11:27:29. Ezek. 44:7:9. Isaiah 26:2.
5. That a Church thus gathered, hath Power To Chuse and ordain those officers that Christ Hath Apointed in his Church: Such as Bishops or Elders and Deacons: and by the Same power to depose such officers as Evidently appear to walk Conterary to the Gospel: and also to Disapline their members: But yet In Such Cases it is Conveniente to advise with neighbouring Churches of the Same Constitution. Acts 1, 21 -26 and 6:3. Numb. 8:10. Math. 18:15 – 18. Acts 15.
6. That the Bishop or Elder, hath no more power to Decide any Case, or Controvercy, in the Church than any private brother: But his work is to Lead in The actings of the Church and to administer the Sacraments and Devote himself to the Work

of teaching, Warning, Rebuking, and Exorting the People; Publickly and from house to house. Math. 20:25 – 28. Acts 20:20. 28:31.

7. That the minister hath a right to a temporal maintainance From the People: and that it Should be done by free Contribution; as those that did minister at the alter were to partake of the free offerings of the Lord. 1 Corinth. 9:13:14.

8. That the Deacons office work is to take care of The poor and of the Churches treasure to distrebut to the Support of the Pastor the propegation of Religion and the minister at the Lords table. Acts 6:1.

9. That Every Saint is Commanded to be faithfull to Improve all the gifts and graces that are Bestowed on them, in their proper Place and to their Right End. Even the glory of God and the Good of Souls. Rom. 12:5 – 8. 1 Peter 4:10:11.

### The Covenant

Thus Haveing Declared our Faith:

We Do now In the Presence of the great God, and By the help of his grace;  
Renewedly, and unitedly Give up our Selves to God almighty father Son and holy Ghost;  
Promising to be for him and no other, takeing Him as our Chiefest good and only portion.  
Promising To Watch against Every sin, Corruption and temptation In our Selves and others, and to hold a Continual and Perpetual warfare with the Same. Looking to Christ Jesus who is the auther and finisher of our faith. Promising to watch over one-another in Love and to Hold Communion together in the ordinances and disapline of the gospel Church according as we Shall be Guided by the Spirit of God in his Word: believeing

That God will yet further and more gloriously open His word and the misteries of his Kingdom. Looking and waiting for the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

# **The Confession of Faith and Covenant of the Church of Christ in Titicut Signed**

**Jan. 16, 1756<sup>2</sup>**

## **The Articles of Faith**

### *Part One*

1. We Believe that there is but One only living and true God Who is a Spirit infinite, eternal and unchangable, in his Being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. Deu. 6.4. Joh. 4.24. Psal. 147.5. Psal. 90.2. Jam. 1.17. Isa. 40.28. Jer. 10.10. Isa. 6.3. Exod. 34.6, 7.

2. That there are three Persons in the Godhead, the Father, Son, and holy Ghost, who are but one God, the same in Substance, equal in power and glory. 1 Joh. 5.7. Phil. 2.6. Act. 5.3, 4.

3. That the holy Scriptures of the old and new Testament are the Word of God, which he hath Given as our only perfect rule of faith and practice. Act. 20.32. 2 Tim. 3.15, 16, 17.

4. That God who is Infinite in knowledge and perfectly views all things from the Beginning to the end of Time hath foreordained that whatsoever come to pass, either by his Order or Permission shall Work for the eternal Glory of his Great Name. Act. 15.18. Rom. 9.17 to 23. Act. 2.23. Psal. 76.10.

5. In the Beginning God created Heaven and earth, the Sea and all that in them is; and he upholds and governs all things by the Word of his Power. Exod. 20.11. Heb. 1.3. Dan. 4.35.

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<sup>2</sup> Isaac Backus, *The Diary of Isaac Backus*, Volume III: 1786-1806, ed. William G. McLoughlin (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1979), Appendix 19.

6. That God made man in his own image in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, and made With him a Covenant of Life, the Condition whereof was perfect Obedience. Gen. 1.26, 27 and 2.16. 17. Galat. 3.10.

7. Man being left to himself, soon fell from that happy and glorious Estate, in which he was made, by eating the forbidden Fruit; Whereby he brought himself and all his posterity into a state of Death. Gen. 3.6. Rom. 5.12, 19.

8. Man being thus Dead, his Help and Recovery is wholly in and from God. Hos. 13.9. Eph. 2.8. Joh. 6.44.

9. God the father of his mear good pleasure from all Eternity hath Chosen a number of poor Lost men, in Christ Jesus to eternal Salvation. Rom. 8.29, 30. Eph. 1.4, 5.

10. Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God hath come and taken on him Humane-Nature and in that Nature hath yielded a perfect Obedience to the Law that we have Broken, and suffered Death for our Sins: and hath brought in a compleate and Everlasting Righteousness and hath risen and Ascended to the right hand of God and ever Liveth to make Intercession for us. Heb. 10.5 to 10. Dan. 9.24. Heb. 7.25.

11. The Holy Ghost, and He only can and doth make a particular Application of the Redemption purchased by Christ to every Elect Soul. Joh. 3.5 and 16.7 to 15.

12. The Spirit of God Applies this Redemption By Convinceing us of our Sinful Lost and Miserable Condition, and then discovering the glorious Saviouer, as he is offered to us in the gospel, in his Sutableness and Sufficiency and enableing us to Imbrace him with our whole Souls; whereby he is made unto us Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption. John 16.8 and 1.12. 1 Cor. 1.30.

13. The Life of Religion consists in the Knowledge of God and conformity to him in the inward Man; which Necessarily produceth an External conformity to His Law, and brings us to live in Obedience to his holy Will in all our Ways, and in our Several Places and Relations. John 17.3. Mat. 23.26. Eph. 2.10. Tit. 2.

14. True Believers being United to Jesus Christ by Faith have Communion with God; and by his Spirit they are united to each other, and have Communion One with another, whereby they are made partakers of each others Gifts and Graces. 1 John 1.3. Rom. 1.11. Phil. 1.7.

15. We believe that the first Day of the week, commonly called the Lords-day is the Christian Sabbath. Mat. 28.1 to 6. John 20.19, 26. Rev. 1.10. Heb. 4:8, 9, 10.

16. That God hath appointed the Ordinances of civil Government, for the defending of the poor as well as the rich in their civil Rights and Privileges: and the civil Magistrates work is to punish Moral Evils and to encourage moral Vertue without touching upon anything that Infringes upon the Conscience, or pretending to dictate and govern in the Worship of the eternal God; which belongs only to Jesus Christ the great Lawgiver and head of his Church. Rom. 13.1 to 4. 1 Pet. 2.13 to 15. 1 Tim. 1.8, 9, 10. Mat. 23.8, 9, 10. Luk. 22.25, 26. Isa. 33.20, 21, 22. Eph. 1.22.

17. We believe there will be a general Ressurrection, both of the just, and unjust: and that God hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the World in righteousness, by Jesus Christ; and will reward every man according to his Works; when the Wicked shall be sent into everlasting Punishment, and the righteous be received into life eternal. John. 5.28, 29. Rom. 2.16. Mat. 16.27 and 25.46.



## *Second Part Concerning Church Affairs*

1. We Believe that a visible Church of Christ is a number of his Saints and People, by mutual acquaintance and communion, volentarily and understandingly Covenanting and embodying together for the carrying on the Worship and Service of God. 1 Pet. 2.5. 1 Cor. 1.2. Act. 2.42 to 47.

2. That Baptism and the Lords supper are Ordinances of Christ, to be continued untill his second coming, and that the former is requisite to the latter; that is to say, that those are to be admitted into the communion of the Church; and to pertake of all its Ordinances who upon profession of their faith have been baptized by immersion in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Mat.28.19, 20. 1 Cor. 11.23, 26. Act. 2.41 and 9.18, 26 and 8.12, 36 to 39. Mat. 3.6, 16. Rom. 6.4. John 3.23.

3. Since none but Saints can rightly pertake of these Ordinances therefore the door of the Church should be carefully kept at all times against all such as can't give Scriptural evidences of their union to Christ by faith. 1 Cor. 11.27, 29. Mat. 7.6, 15 to 20. Ezek. 44.7, 9. Isa. 26.2.

4. A Church thus gathered hath power to Chuse and Ordain those officers that Christ hath appointed in his Church namely, Bishops or Elders, and Deacons: and also to depose such Officers as evidently appear to walk conterary to the Gospel, and to discipline their members: tho' in some such cases it is convenient and profitable to request the advice of neighbouring Churches of Christ. Act. 1.21 to 26 and 6.3. Num. 8.10. Mat. 18.15 to 18. Act. 15.

5. A Bishop, or elder hath no more power to decide any case or controversy in the Church than any privete Brother: yet they having superior Gifts for teaching and ruleing,

ought to exercise and improve the same, for the benifit of the Church, and the Church ought to be subject to the Gifts bestowed on the Minister from the Lord, while he is rightly acting in his place; Whose Work is, to lead in the actings of the Churc and to administer the Sacraments, and devote himself to the Work of Teaching, warning, rebukeing and exorting the People, publickly and from House to House. Mat. 20.25 to 28. 1 Pet. 5.3. Mat. 28.19. Act. 20.20, 28, 31.

6. The Deacons office-work is to take care of the Poor, and to have the oversight of the Temporal Affairs of the Church, and to minister at the Lords-Table. Act. 6.1 to 4. 1 Tim. 3.8 to 13.

7. Every Saint is commanded to be faithful and to improve every gift and Talant that is bestowed on them in order to which there ought to be such a gospel freedom that the Church may know where every particular Gift is, that it may be improved in it proper place and to its right end, even the glory of God and the good of his People; and the Church ought to be subject to such Improvements. Rom. 12.5 to 8. 1 Pet. 4.10, 11 and 5.5.

### The Covenant

We do now in the presence of the great allseing and most glorious God; and before Angels and Men, give up ourselves to the Lord Jehovah, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and avouch him this day to be our God, our Father, our Saviour and our Leader, and receive him as our Portion for ever. We give up our selves unto the Lord Jesus Christ, and adhere to him as the head of his People in the Covenant of grace, and rely on him as our Prophet, Priest and King to bring us to eternal Blessedness. We acknowledge our

everlasting and indispensable Obligation to glorify our God by living a holy, righteous and Godly Life, in this present World in all our several Places and Relations: and we do engage by the assistance of the divine Spirit to improve all our time and strength, talents, and advantages for his glory and the good of our fellowmen: Promising by divine help to walk in our Houses with a perfect heart, and to train up those under our Care in the ways of God. And we also give up our selves to one another in Covenant, promising to act towards each other as Bretherin in Christ, watching over one another in the Love of God; and to watch not only against (them that are reckoned) more gross Evils, But also against all Foolish talking and jesting which is not convenient; Vain disputeing about Words and things which gender strife; Disregarding Promises and not fulfilling of engagements; Tatling and backbiting; Spending time idly at Taverns or else where, and vain and unnecessary worldly Conversation on Lords-days, - and Whatsoever else that is conterary to sound Doctrine according to the glorious gospel of Christ. Promising to hold Communion together in the Worship of God, and in the Ordinances and Discipline of his Church, according as we are or shall be guided by the Spirit of God in his Word; Expecting that he will yet further and more gloriously open his Word and the Mysteries of his Kingdom; Flying to the Blood of the Everlasting Covenant for the Pardon of our many Errours, and praying that the Lord would prepare and strengthen us for every Good Work to do his will working in us that which is well pleasing in his sight thro' Jesus Christ; to whom be Glory for ever and ever. Amen.

## **First Baptist Church, North Middleboro**

### **Statement of Faith (2011)**

I believe –

1. In one Holy, Almighty God, eternally existing in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, co-eternal in being, coidentical in nature, co-equal in power and glory, each with distinct personal attributes, but without division of nature, essence or being.

Biblical Reference: Deuteronomy 6:4, Matthew 28:19, John 1:1-2, II Corinthians 13:14, Philippians 2:6

2. In the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Old and New Testaments; that they are infallible, inerrant in the original writings, and the final authority for faith and life.

Biblical Reference: II Timothy 3:16, II Peter 1 20-21, Matthew 5:18, John 16: 12-13

3. That the Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, without ceasing to be God, became man by the Holy Spirit and virgin birth; that he lived a sinless life on earth; that he died at Calvary as a satisfactory substitutionary sacrifice for sinners; that his body was buried in and arose from the tomb; that he ascended to Heaven and was glorified as a man at Gods right hand; that He is coming again for His own and then to set up His Kingdom.

Biblical Reference: John 1:1, Matthew 1:20-23, II Corinthians 5:21, Hebrews 1:3, Hebrews 10:12, John 16:7-11, Matthew 19:28, Matthew 25:31, II Timothy 2:8

4. That the Holy Spirit is a divine person who convicts the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment; that He is that supernatural agent in regeneration by

whom all believers are baptized into the body of Christ; that he indwells and seals them until the day of redemption. He is the divine teacher and helper who guides believers into all truth; it is the privilege of all believers to be filled with the spirit.

Biblical Reference: John 16:7-15, I Corinthians 12:13, II Corinthians 1:22, Ephesians 1:13

5. That God created man in His own image and in the state of innocence. Through Adams

transgression sin entered the world, and death through sin; and consequently, mankind inherited a corrupt nature, being born in sin and under condemnation. As soon as men are capable of moral action, they become actual transgressors in thought, word and deed.

Biblical Reference: Genesis 1:26-27, Romans 5:12, Romans 3:23, I John 1:8, Ephesians 2:3

6. That salvation is a gift of God brought to men by grace and received only through personal repentance for sin and faith in the person and the finished work and atoning blood of Jesus Christ.

Biblical Reference: Ephesians 1:7, 2:1-10, John 1:12

7. In the bodily resurrection of all men, the saved to eternal life and the unsaved to everlasting punishment. That the souls of the redeemed are, at death absent from the body and present with the Lord where, in conscious bliss they await the first resurrection when spirit, soul, and body are reunited to be glorified forever with the Lord.

Biblical Reference: Revelation 20, Acts 24:25, John 5:28-29, Luke 16:19-31, II Corinthians 5:8, I Thessalonians 4:14-17, I John 3:2

8. That the church universal is a spiritual organism composed of the regenerated who are baptized into that body by the Holy Spirit at the time of the new birth and that the local church, the visible manifestation of the body, has the responsibility to provide for the fellowship and edification of believers and to propagate the Gospel into the world.

Biblical Reference: Acts 2, I Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 5:27, Mark 16:15.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> First Baptist Church, North Middleboro, website, [http://www.fbcnm.org/about-us!\\_\\_about-us/statement-of-faith](http://www.fbcnm.org/about-us!__about-us/statement-of-faith) (accessed November 28, 2011).

## APPENDIX 4

### SPIRITUAL MARKERS TIMELINE MORNINGSTAR BAPTIST CHURCH

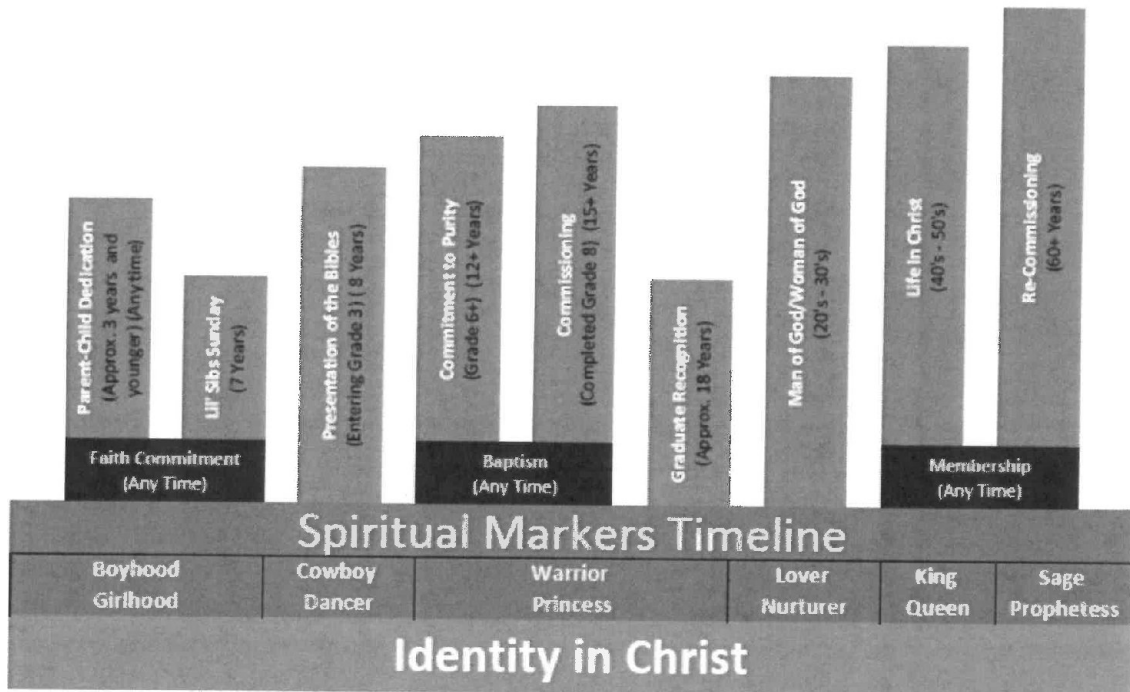


Figure 1. Spiritual markers timeline created for MorningStar Baptist Church. Reprinted with permission from Andrew Hedges, Family Pastor, 2011.

## APPENDIX 5

### SUGGESTED SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

This compilation of spiritual disciplines is designed to serve as and aid as you seek to intentionally practicing disciplines in connection with the spiritual season you find yourself in and the trait/s you are seeking to increase in your life. This is not an exhaustive list of spiritual disciplines. It is a compilation of lists taken from Dallas Willard and Richard Foster.<sup>1</sup> For detailed information about these disciplines please refer to the works by Willard and Foster.

#### 5 increasing traits of a disciple (Mark 12:28-30) -

##### *Passionate Lover: (Heart)*

Worship – Worship is the human response to the divine initiative. We engage ourselves with, dwell upon, and express the greatness, beauty, and goodness of God through thought and the use of words, rituals, and symbols.

Celebration – We engage in celebration when we enjoy ourselves, our life, our world, in conjunction with our faith and confidence in God's greatness, beauty, and goodness. We concentrate on our life and world as God's work and as God's gift to us.

Fellowship – In fellowship we engage in common activities of worship, study, prayer, celebration, and service with other disciples. In it we receive the ministry of all the graces of the Spirit to the church.

Confession – Confession lets trusted others know our deepest weaknesses and failures in order to nourish our faith in God's provision for our needs through his people and our sense of being loved while deepening our humility before our brothers and sisters.

Prayer – Prayer is conversing, communicating with God aloud or within our thoughts. It is the central avenue God uses to change us because in real prayer we begin to think God's thoughts after Him: to desire the things He desires, to love the things He loves, to will the things He wills.

Solitude – We purposefully abstain from interaction with other human beings, denying ourselves companionship and all that comes from our conscious

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<sup>1</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1991). Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1988).



interaction with others. It is choosing to be alone and to dwell on our experience of isolation from other human beings.

*Zealous Chooser: (Soul)*

**Fasting** – In fasting, we abstain in some significant way from food and possibly drink as well. It reveals the things that control us as we abstain from food and feast on the Word of God.

**Frugality** – Frugality means we stay the bounds of what general good judgment would designate as necessary for the kind of life to which God has led us. We abstain from using money or goods at our disposal in ways that merely gratify our desires or our hunger for status, glamour, or luxury.

**Chastity** – Chastity purposefully turns away from dwelling upon or engaging in the sexual dimension of our relationships to others – even our husbands or wives. The essence of chastity is the total orientation of one's life toward a goal.

**Sacrifice** – In sacrifice we abstain from the possession or enjoyment of what is necessary for our living – not, as in frugality, from what is really to some degree superfluous anyway. We forsake the security of meeting our needs with what is in our hands. It is total abandonment to God, stepping out in the faith that God will bear us up.

**Solitude** – We purposefully abstain from interaction with other human beings, denying ourselves companionship and all that comes from our conscious interaction with others. It is choosing to be alone and to dwell on our experience of isolation from other human beings.

**Silence** – In silence we close off our souls from sounds. We try to find how quiet we can make our world by making whatever arrangements are necessary.

**Confession** – Confession lets trusted others know our deepest weaknesses and failures in order to nourish our faith in God's provision for our needs through his people and our sense of being loved while deepening our humility before our brothers and sisters.

**Prayer** – Prayer is conversing, communicating with God aloud or within our thoughts. It is the central avenue God uses to change us because in real prayer we begin to think God's thoughts after Him: to desire the things He desires, to love the things He loves, to will the things He wills.

### *Critical Thinker: (Mind)*

**Study** – In study we engage ourselves, above all, with the written and spoken Word of God. We strive to see the Word of God at work in our lives, in the lives of others, in the church, in history, and in nature.

**Meditation** – Meditation is an attempt to center the attention of the body, the emotions, the mind, and the spirit upon “the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6) through the central reference point of Scripture. It creates the emotional and spiritual space which allows Christ to construct an inner sanctuary in the heart.

**Memorization** – In memorization we engage ourselves in committing the Word of God to memory for easy access and future reference.

**Prayer** - Prayer is conversing, communicating with God aloud or within our thoughts. It is the central avenue God uses to change us because in real prayer we begin to think God’s thoughts after Him: to desire the things He desires, to love the things He loves, to will the things He wills.

### *Sacrificial Steward: (Strength)*

**Service** – In service we engage our goods and strength in the active promotion of the good of others and the causes of God in our world.

**Sacrifice** – In sacrifice we abstain from the possession or enjoyment of what is necessary for our living – not, as in frugality, from what is really to some degree superfluous anyway. We forsake the security of meeting our needs with what is in our hands. It is total abandonment to God, stepping out in the faith that God will bear us up.

**Secrecy** – Secrecy is to abstain from causing our good deeds and qualities to be known. We may even take steps to prevent them from being known, if it doesn’t involve deceit. We learn to be unknown and even accept misunderstanding without the loss of peace, joy, or purpose.

**Submission** – In submission we engage the experience of those in our fellowship who are qualified to direct our efforts in growth and who then add the weight of their wise authority on the side of our willing spirit to help us do the things we would like to do and refrain from the things we don’t want to do.

**Fasting** - In fasting, we abstain in some significant way from food and possibly drink as well. It reveals the things that control us as we abstain from food and feast on the Word of God.

Simplicity – Simplicity is pursuing the inward and outward reality of seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Simplicity reorients our lives so that we are content in plenty and in want and possessions are genuinely enjoyed rather than destroying us.

Prayer - Prayer is conversing, communicating with God aloud or within our thoughts. It is the central avenue God uses to change us because in real prayer we begin to think God's thoughts after Him: to desire the things He desires, to love the things He loves, to will the things He wills.

*Missional Liver: (Neighbor)*

Sacrifice – In sacrifice we abstain from the possession or enjoyment of what is necessary for our living – not, as in frugality, from what is really to some degree superfluous anyway. We forsake the security of meeting our needs with what is in our hands. It is total abandonment to God, stepping out in the faith that God will bear us up.

Service – In service we engage our goods and strength in the active promotion of the good of others and the causes of God in our world.

Worship – Worship is the human response to the divine initiative. We engage ourselves with, dwell upon, and express the greatness, beauty, and goodness of God through thought and the use of words, rituals, and symbols.

Celebration – We engage in celebration when we enjoy ourselves, our life, our world, in conjunction with our faith and confidence in God's greatness, beauty, and goodness. We concentrate on our life and world as God's work and as God's gift to us.

Prayer – Prayer is conversing, communicating with God aloud or within our thoughts. It is the central avenue God uses to change us because in real prayer we begin to think God's thoughts after Him: to desire the things He desires, to love the things He loves, to will the things He wills.

#### 4 recurring spiritual seasons in a disciple's journey (Ecclesiastes 3:1-10) –

##### *Spring: Renewing of Faith*

**Prayer:** Prayer in spring is focused and visionary as you are progressing through the freshness of renewed vision for service. Prayer is often “in action” while we are actively working to establish the necessary elements to birth and grow the “new things” in our life and ministry.

**Scripture:** Spring is a time to start something new like reading through the Bible in a year or taking on a new intensive Bible study. This a great to time engage in intense study and memorization.

**Community:** Community and fellowship in spring becomes a partnership as you move from pruning in winter to confession in spring. It is critical to find a few trusted brothers and sisters who will lock arms and go with you as you serve together.

**Worship:** Spring is a time to fill worship with times of serving sacrificially and seeing God's great and beautiful works in and through our service.

**Service:** Spring is a time of renewal and refreshment in service in which we step back into previous service, step it up in current service, or step in to new service.

##### *Summer: Enjoyment of Faith*

**Prayer:** During summer prayer try to be more conversational in nature. Conversation with God can jump from topic to topic like conversations tend to do. It can be nostalgic remembering that God is about to do something new by looking into the past.

**Scripture:** Summer is a time to be more playful with Scripture treating it like an adventure. Topical and character studies are great during this season.

**Community:** Summer fellowship is a great time to build in big events and lots of people.

**Worship:** Summer worship should be filled with opportunities and expressions that fully enjoy the immanent God who is Immanuel.

**Fast:** Fasting during summer is purposeful, in preparation for the fall or for keeping our heart in check.

### *Fall: Harvest of Faith*

**Prayer:** Prayed is focused on constant praise and gratitude to God for all His lavish blessings and gifts. This can include memorials, altars, or some aspect of journaling to mark the blessing of God for future reference.

**Scripture:** The Pauline and General Epistles are good for this season because they express much of what God is doing and how He is working in the midst of correcting things that can lead the church off course.

**Community:** Fall is a time for fellowship that is filled with thanksgiving and rejoicing in celebration of God's gifts together. Celebration is the natural response to the gifts of God manifested in dancing, singing, shouting, clapping, etc.

**Worship:** Fall worship centers on gratefully celebrating the gifts of God.

**Frugality:** Frugality helps us learn to discipline ourselves to store up for the coming spiritual winter.

### *Winter: Testing of Faith*

**Prayer:** Prayer may be long and wandering, journaling, hibernate and isolate to be intimate with God. Winter prayer is not necessarily to see God do something but just to be with Him, to find Him.

**Scripture:** This is a great season to read the Psalms. Try a slower view of Scripture in which we meditate and contemplate on smaller portions of Scripture.

**Community:** Fellowship is akin to a coffee shop experience. It is like sitting around the fireplace. Find a few close friends and go through this time with them deepening intimacy. Seek honesty and truth.

**Worship:** Winter worship is full of elements that hold out hope and connect with the transcendent God.

**Simplicity:** During winter simplicity helps us look at what we have and enjoy it as the gift from the hand of God.

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